

Rangeland **LOVE**

a
LOVERS
magazine

No. 2 MAR.
10¢

ROMANCE OF THE
PURPLE SAGE!

YVONNE DE CARLO
and
JOHN RUSSELL
starring in
Universal-
International's
"The Gal Who
Took the West"

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BREAKS LOOSE
WHEN THERE'S A —
RED-HEAD
ON THE RANGE**



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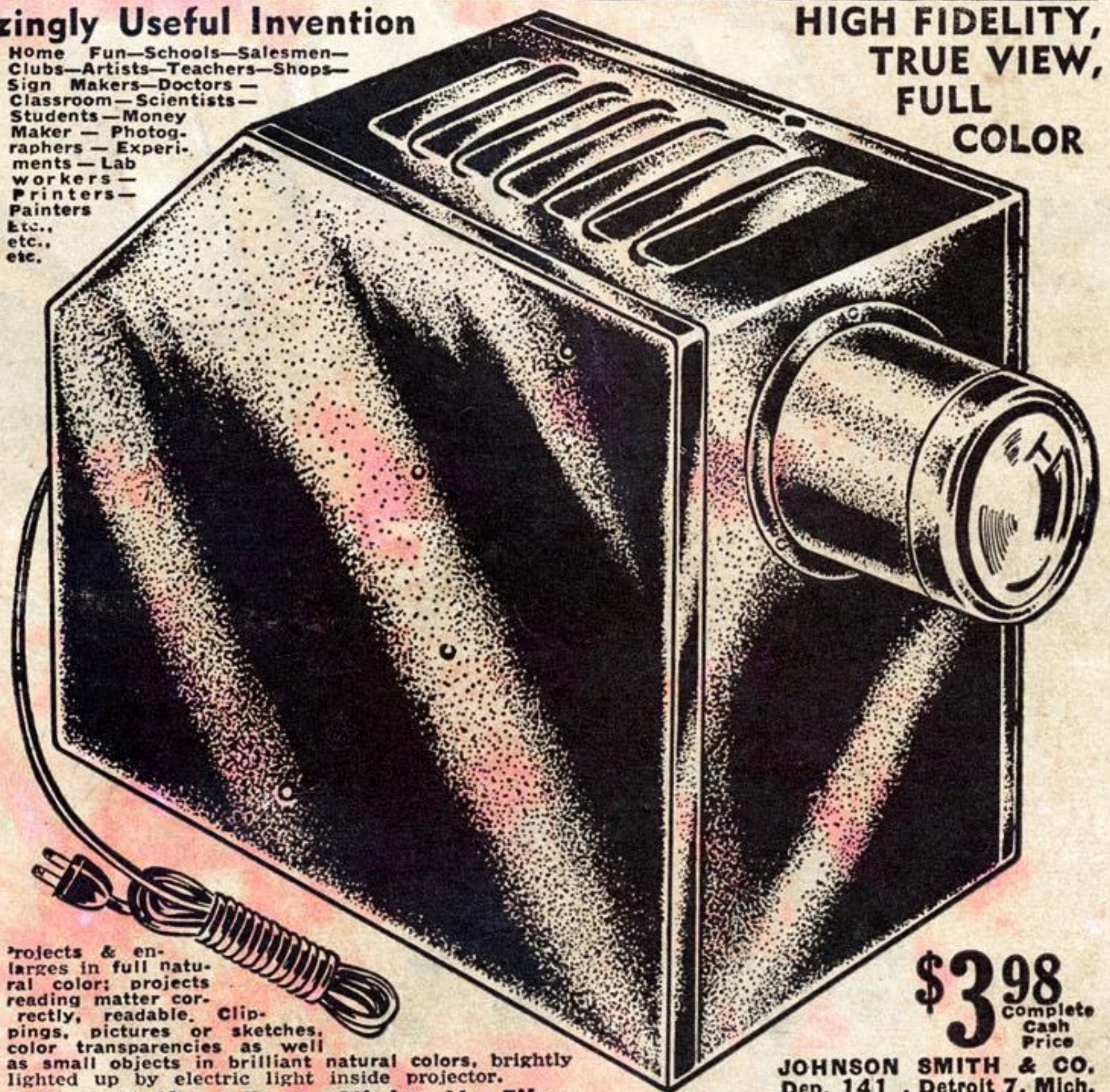
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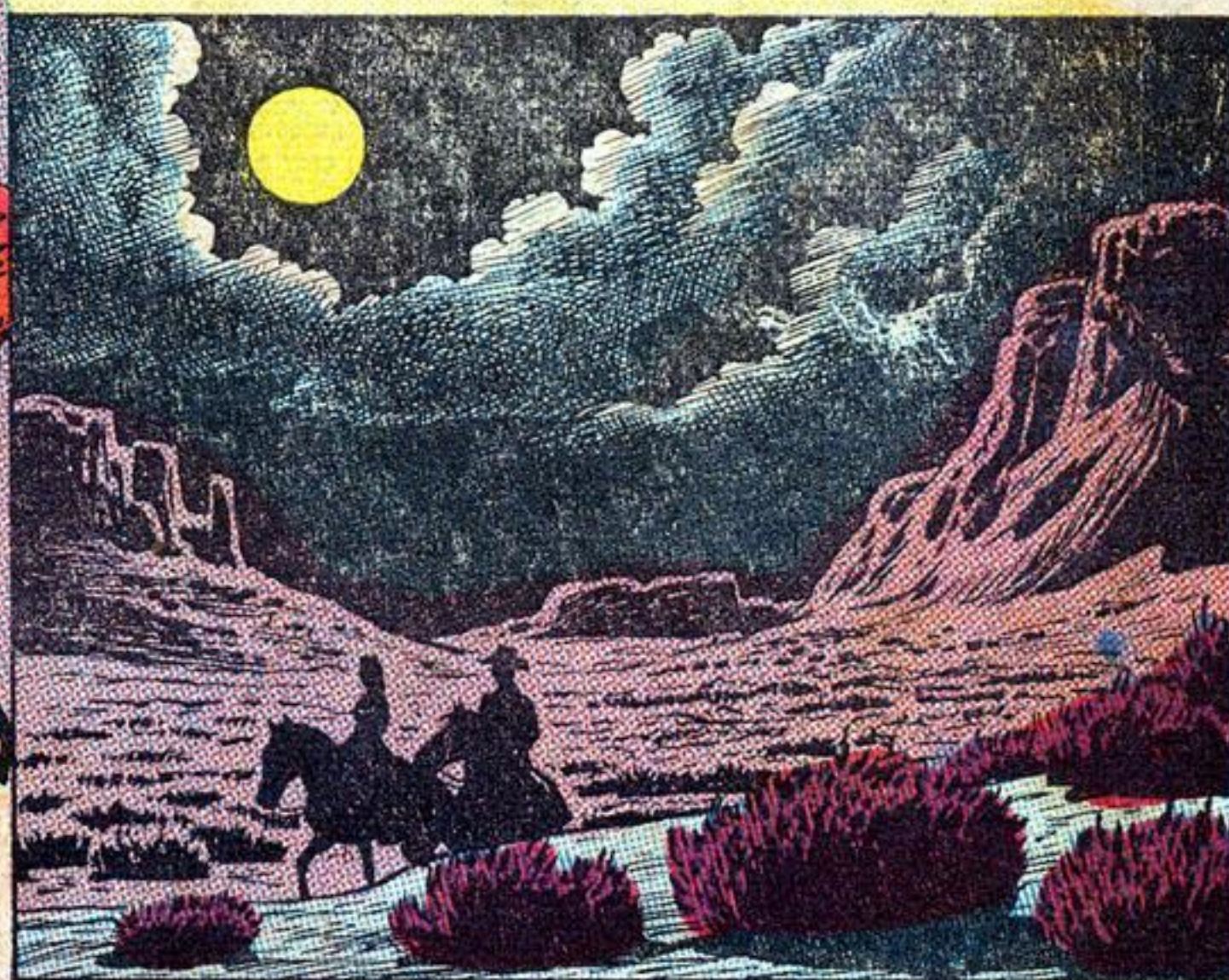
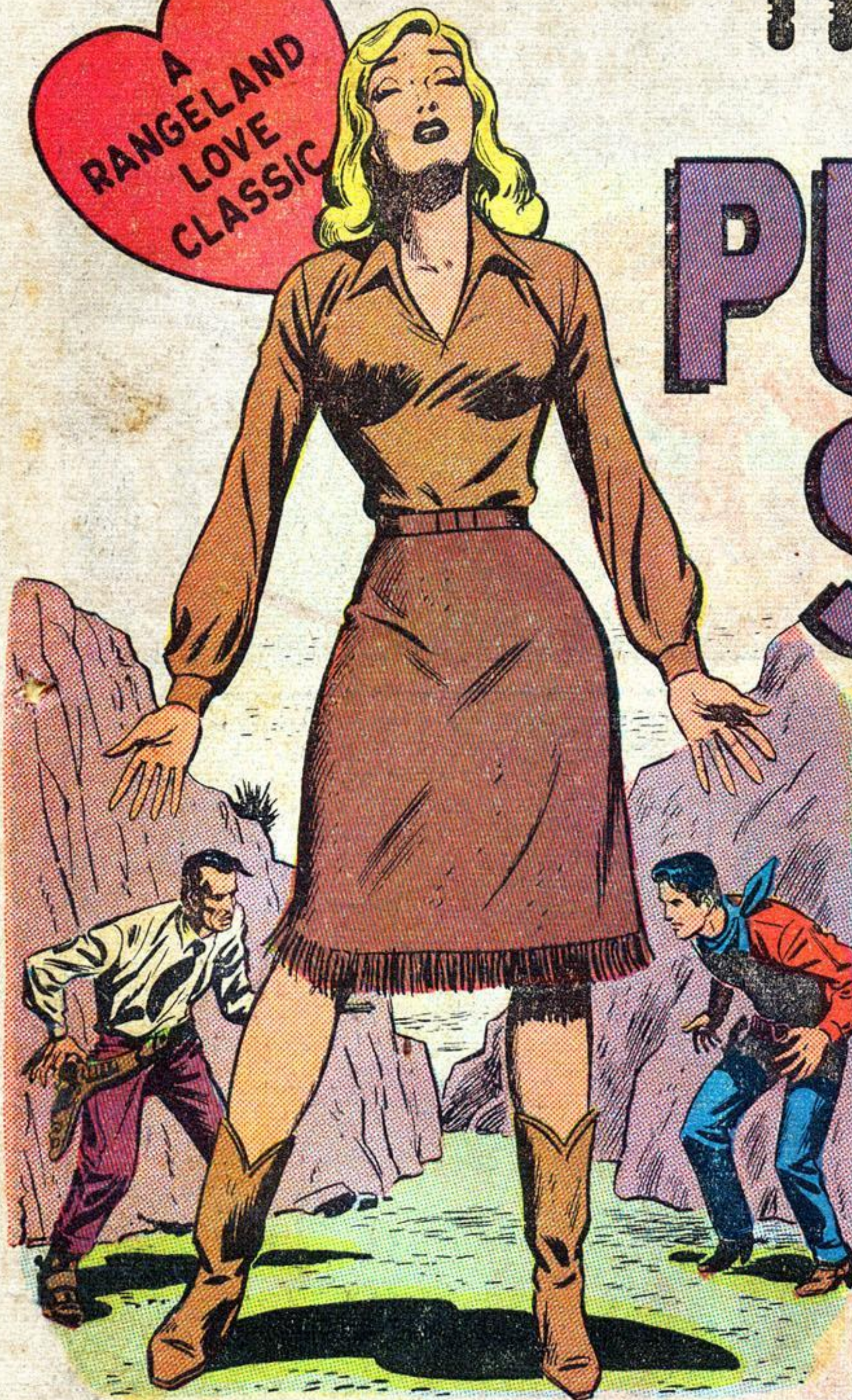
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A
RANGELAND
LOVE
CLASSIC

THE TRAIL OF THE PURPLE SAGE!

DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE WEST, WHERE THE GREAT MOUNTAINS LOOK DOWN IN PERPETUAL SERENITY UPON THE RAMBLING, LIFE-GIVING PLAINS, IS THAT BREATH-TAKINGLY BEAUTIFUL RANGE CALLED...THE PURPLE SAGE!



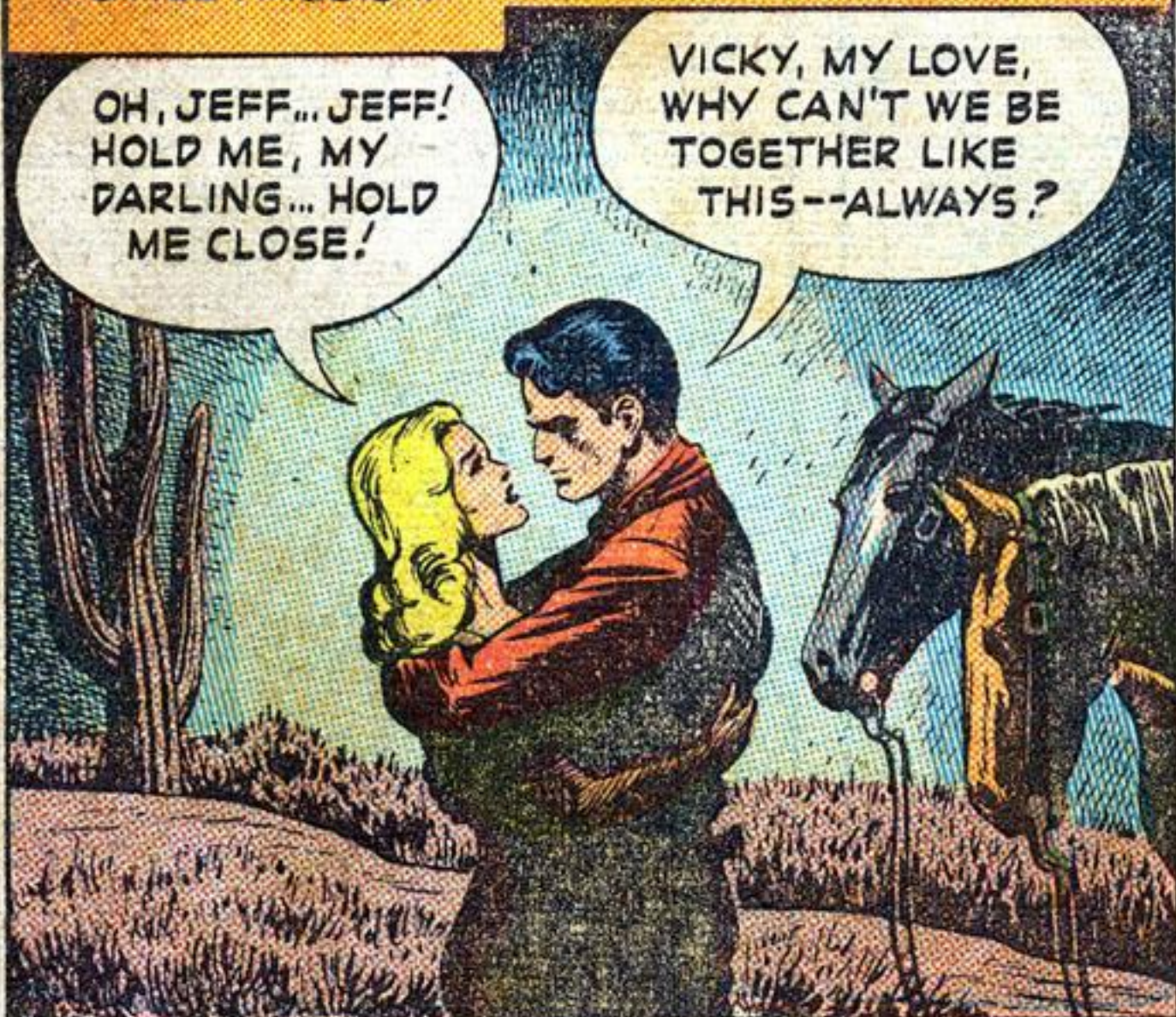
RANGELAND LOVE 2

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THE TRAIL THAT MARKED THE PASSAGE THROUGH THAT SAGE WAS, TO ME, LOVER'S LANE... FOR THIS WAS WHERE MY LOVE FOR JEFF CONROY WAS BORN... A LOVE BORN OF DESPAIR AND FUTILE ANGUISH!

OH, JEFF... JEFF!
HOLD ME, MY
DARLING... HOLD
ME CLOSE!

VICKY, MY LOVE,
WHY CAN'T WE BE
TOGETHER LIKE
THIS--ALWAYS?



JEFF CONROY WAS MY FATHER'S FOREMAN, THE BEST RANCH BOSS OF OUR COUNTY! HE AND I HAD FALLEN IN LOVE THE FIRST MOMENT WE SAW EACH OTHER... BUT OUR LOVE WAS A SECRET, FURTIVE THING, SNATCHED WHEN WE WERE ALONE LIKE THIS, FAR FROM FATHER'S DISAPPROVAL!

WE COULD GET MARRIED,
VICKY--WE BELONG TO-
GETHER! THERE WILL
NEVER BE ANYONE ELSE
FOR EITHER OF
US, WILL THERE?

NEVER, JEFF...
NEVER! I LOVE YOU,
MY DARLING, BUT YOU
KNOW THAT OUR LOVE
IS HOPELESS! FATHER
HAS DIFFERENT PLANS
FOR MY
FUTURE!





THAT OLD BUZZARD!
HE DOESN'T WANT YOU
TO HAVE ANYTHING TO
DO WITH A COW HAND
... WANTS YOU TO
MARRY A BANKER OR
A CATTLE KING!

DON'T BE TOO
HARSH ON
HIM, DEAR!
AFTER ALL,
HE MEANS
WELL... HE'S
THINKING OF
MY HAPPINESS...
AND MY
FUTURE!

JEFF AND I OFTEN STOLE AWAY TO OUR SECRET MEETING PLACE--THE TRAIL OF THE PURPLE SAGE! THERE WE HELD EACH OTHER, WHISPERING OUR HOPES! WE ALWAYS WENT BACK TO THE RANCH SEPARATELY, TO ESCAPE DETECTION BY FATHER! BUT THIS TIME...



GOOD-BYE,
DARLING... I'LL
GO AHEAD!

I... THINK HE SUS-
PECTS NOW-- BUT
HE'S NOT SURE! OH,
JEFF, I DON'T KNOW
WHAT HE'D DO IF HE
WERE SURE!

I WATCHED JEFF, TALL AND STRAIGHT IN THE SADDLE, RIDE AWAY AND MY HEART WENT WITH HIM... HE WAS SO WONDERFUL... SO GOOD! THEN... WHEN JEFF WAS GONE, MY FATHER'S VOICE CRACKED THE STILLNESS--AND MY HEART!



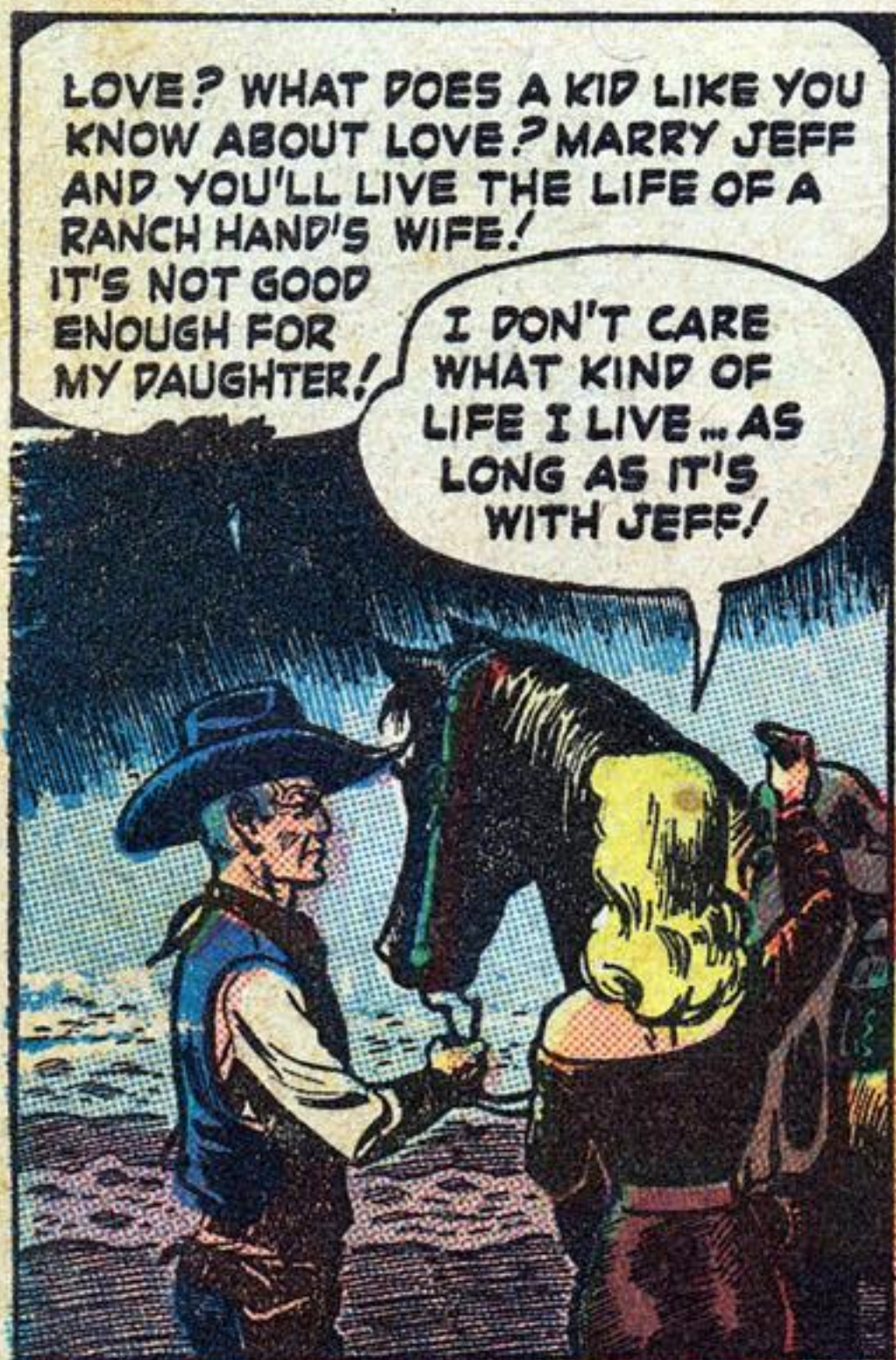
VICKY! SO
YOU'VE BEEN
STEALIN' OFF TO
MAKE LOVE TO THAT
COW HAND, EH?

OH... DAD! YOU
STARTLED ME!
YOU--YOU'VE BEEN
SPYING ON ME!



LISTEN, DAUGHTER, DON'T PLAY INNOCENT WITH ME... YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT... YOU AND JEFF HAVE BEEN SEEING EACH OTHER IN SECRET! DO YOU THINK I RAISED MY DAUGHTER TO FALL IN LOVE WITH A COMMON COWPOKE? I MEAN FOR YOU TO HAVE BETTER THAN THAT, GAL!

OH, DAD, THERE IS
NO ONE BETTER THAN
JEFF! WE LOVE EACH
OTHER-- CAN'T YOU
UNDERSTAND THAT?



LOVE? WHAT DOES A KID LIKE YOU KNOW ABOUT LOVE? MARRY JEFF AND YOU'LL LIVE THE LIFE OF A RANCH HAND'S WIFE! IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR MY DAUGHTER!

I DON'T CARE
WHAT KIND OF
LIFE I LIVE... AS
LONG AS IT'S
WITH JEFF!



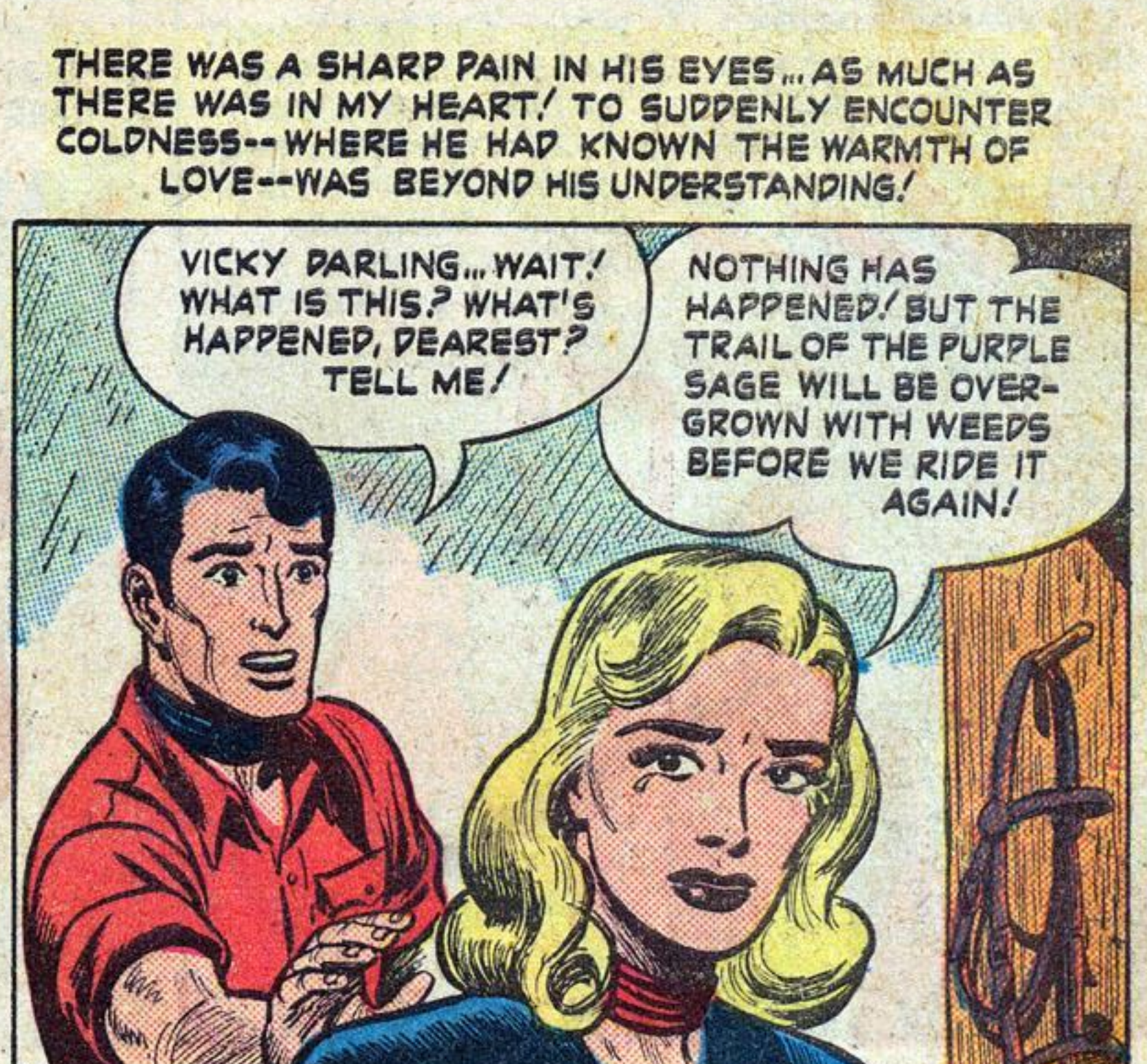
I'LL FIRE THE GALOOT AND I'LL SEE THAT HE DOESN'T GET A JOB WITHIN FIVE HUNDRED MILES OF HERE! I'LL NOT SEE YOUR LIFE WASTED ON A NOBODY LIKE A COMMON COWBOY!

NO, DAD! YOU
WOULDN'T DO A
THING LIKE THAT...
YOU WOULDN'T
FIRE HIM!



WOULDN'T I?
I'LL NOT ONLY
FIRE HIM-- I'LL
RUIN HIM FOR
GOOD! I'LL
BLACKLIST
HIM IN THE
CATTLEMEN'S
LEAGUE-- THAT'S
HOW FAR I'D
GO TO TAKE
CARE OF YOU,
VICKY!

HOW COULD YOU
BE SO HEART-
LESS? WEREN'T
YOU EVER YOUNG?
WEREN'T YOU
EVER IN LOVE?
WHY DO YOU
WANT TO
SEE ME
UNHAPPY?



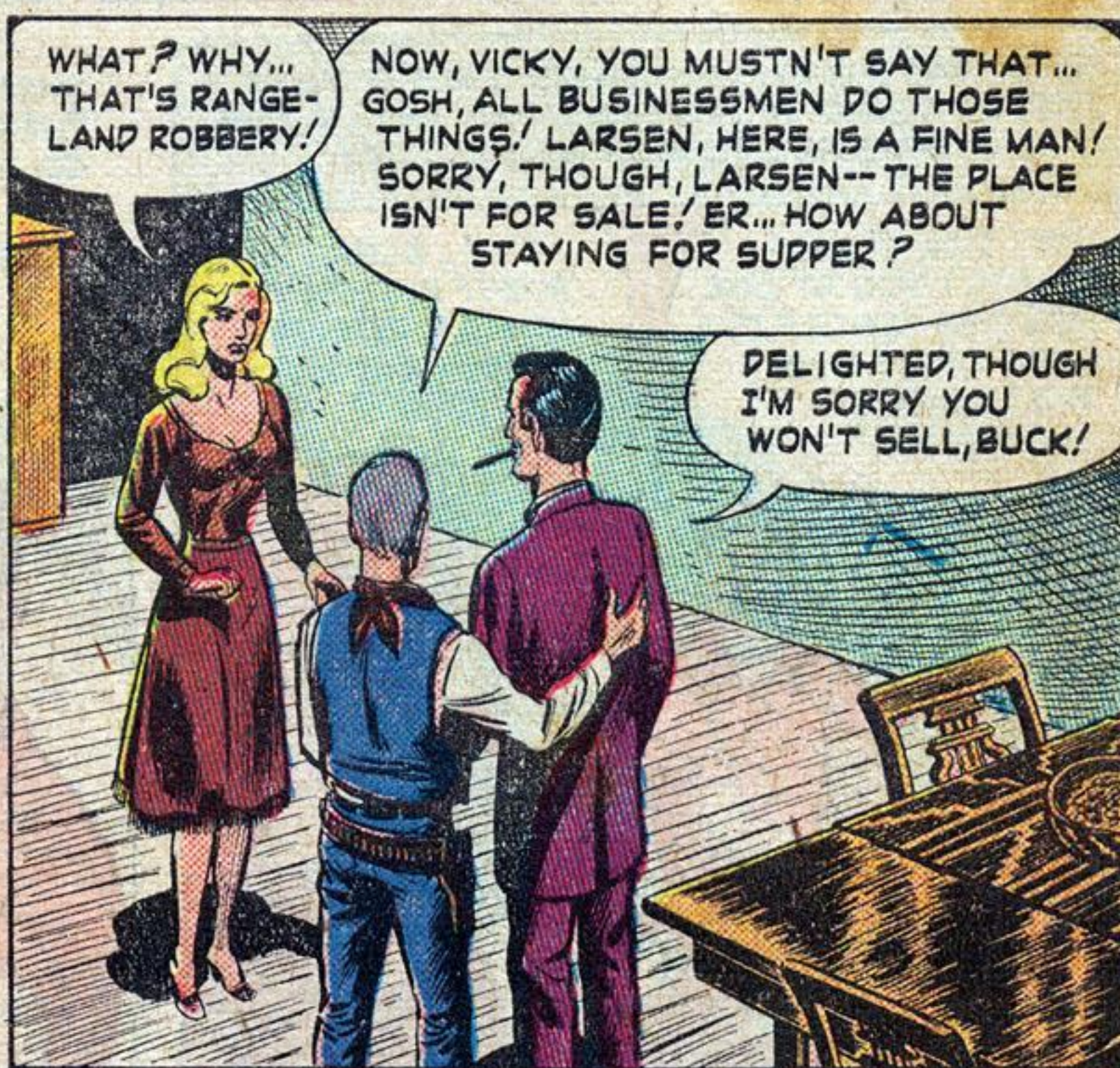
IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED WE BOTH CARRIED OUR SECRET BURDEN! AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED, LIFE WAS OVER! WAS I DOING THE RIGHT THING? SHOULD I HAVE DEFIED FATHER AND GONE OFF WITH JEFF... NO MATTER WHAT CAME? I ONLY KNEW THAT JEFF WAS A PROUD MAN, PROUD OF HIS JOB... HE HAD NEVER BEEN FIRED... I COULDN'T SPOIL THAT FOR HIM... NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED! BUT AT NIGHT, WHEN THE MOON CAST ITS GLOW OVER THE PURPLE SAGE... MY HEART CRIED OUT...



WAS I WRONG? I DIDN'T KNOW! BUT I WAS MISERABLE AVOIDING THE MAN I LOVED, TRYING TO MAKE HIM THINK I NO LONGER CARED FOR HIM! THEN, ONE DAY, A STRANGER CAME TO THE RANCH... TALL, DARK, GOOD LOOKING IN A SOMBER SORT OF WAY! FATHER SEEMED GLAD TO SEE HIM!



I DIDN'T LIKE HIM--HE WAS TOO SLICK, TOO WELL DRESSED, HIS TONGUE TOO OILY!



WHILE LARSEN WASHED UP, I HAD A SHOWDOWN WITH FATHER! I HAD GUESSED AT WHY HE WAS SO NICE TO THIS OILY INTRUDER--NOW HE ADMITTED IT...



BUT DAD KEPT PUSHING ME ON LARSEN ALL THROUGH SUPPER, ENCOURAGING HIM TO TALK ABOUT HIMSELF--WHICH HE DID WITH A VENGEANCE!



FATHER FELL ALL OVER HIMSELF TRYING TO MAKE LARSEN LOOK ATTRACTIVE TO ME, TO MY EMBARRASSMENT. IN A LITTLE WHILE IT BECAME OBVIOUS TO THE BROKER AND HE ASKED ME TO GO FOR A RIDE WITH HIM!



NO, SORRY... I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT TONIGHT!

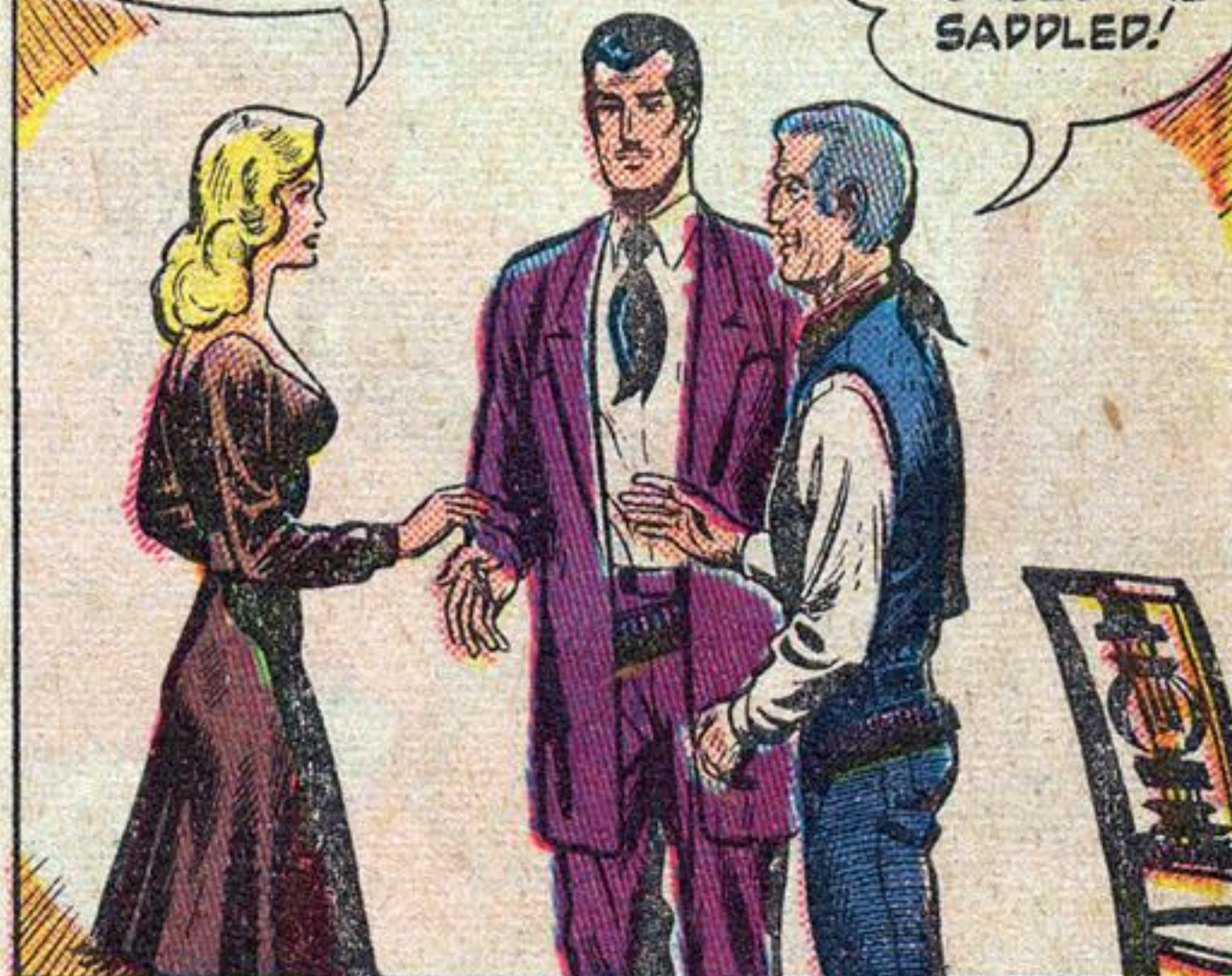
PLEASE, VICKY!

GO ON, VICKY! TAKE LARSEN FOR A RIDE OUT TO THE PURPLE SAGE -- IT'S VERY PRETTY THIS TIME OF NIGHT!

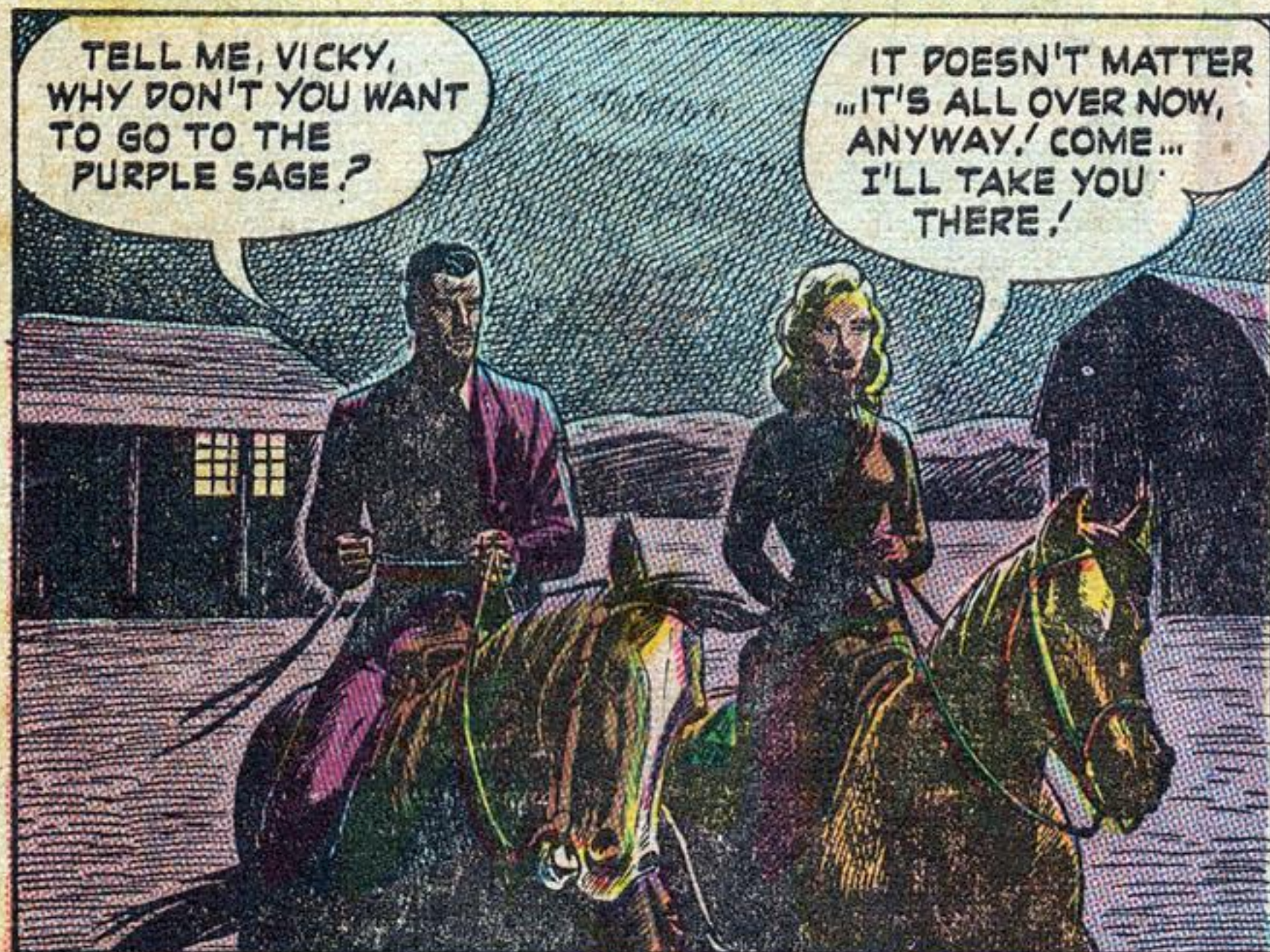
THE PURPLE SAGE! FATHER, HOW CAN YOU SUGGEST SUCH A THING! YOU... KNOW WHAT IT'S MEANT TO ME!

I WANT IT TO MEAN MUCH MORE TO YOU, VICKY! COME... PLEASE!

GO ON! THE HORSES ARE SADDLED!



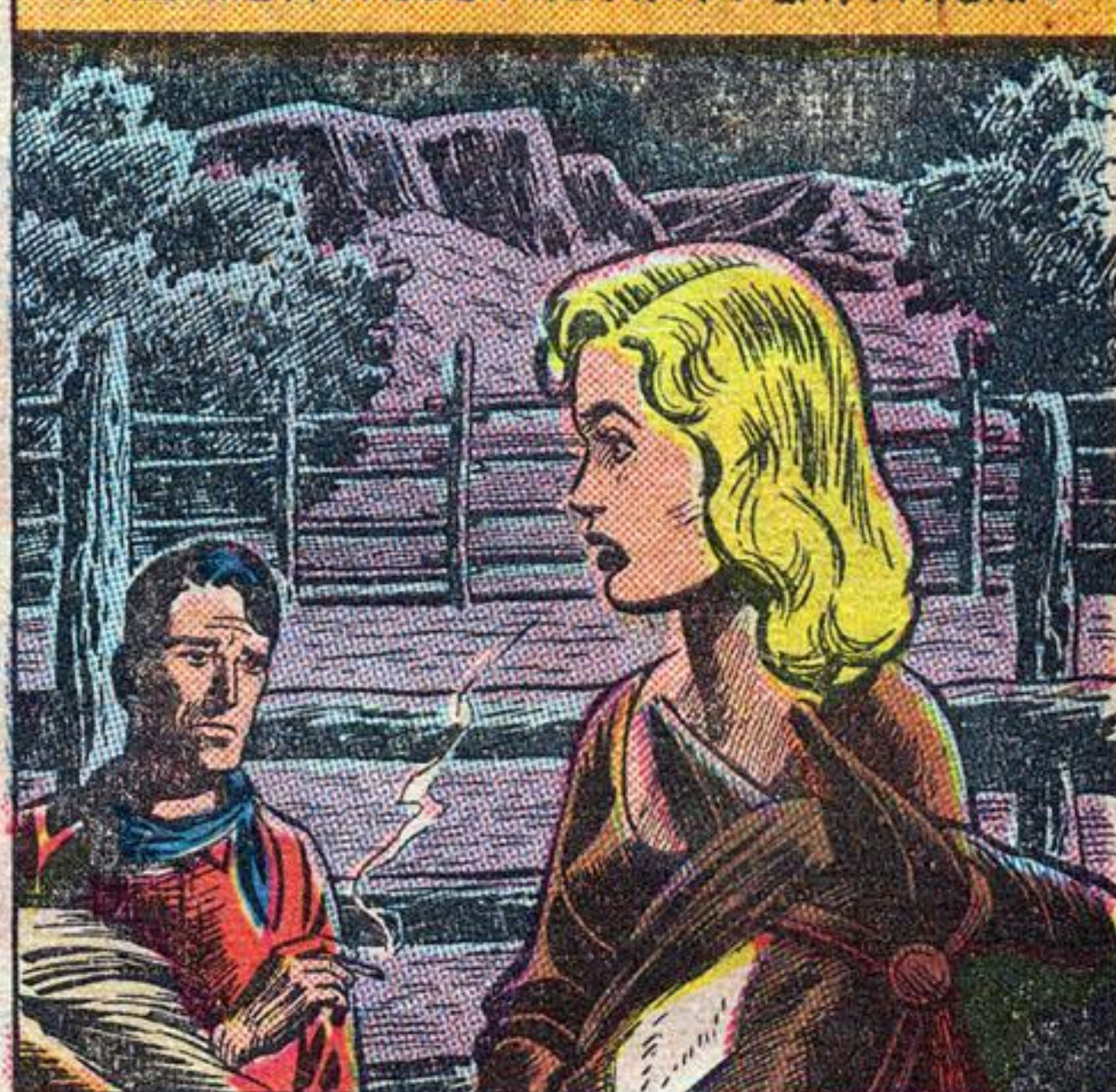
SO I LET MYSELF BE FORCED TO GO FOR A RIDE WITH LARSEN PATCHEN... IT WOULD HAVE BROKEN FATHER'S HEART IF I HAD NOT GONE! AS FOR ME -- I HAD NO HEART LEFT TO BREAK!



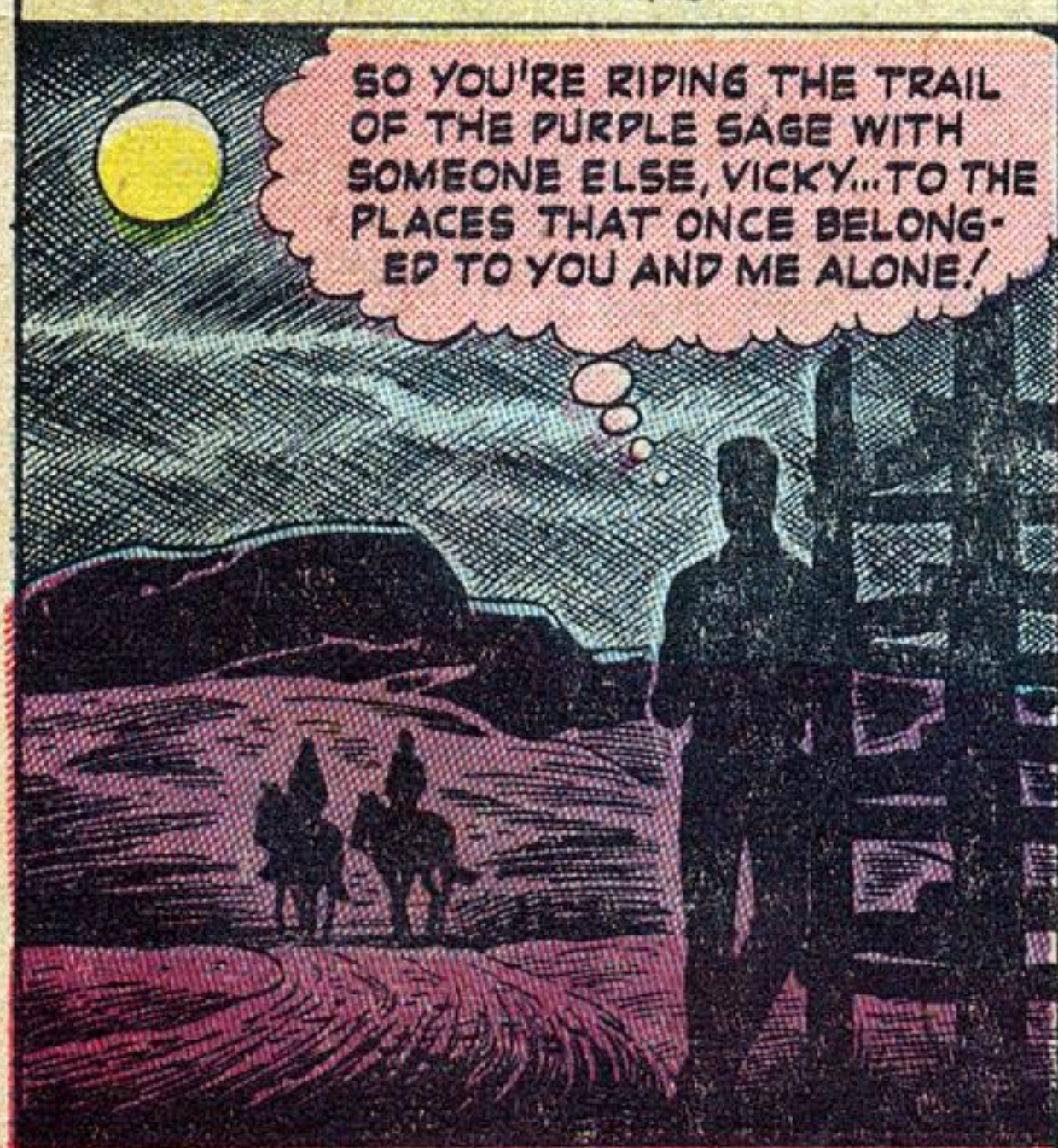
TELL ME, VICKY, WHY DON'T YOU WANT TO GO TO THE PURPLE SAGE?

IT DOESN'T MATTER... IT'S ALL OVER NOW, ANYWAY! COME... I'LL TAKE YOU THERE!

AS WE ROPE OUT, I CAME FACE TO FACE WITH JEFF STANDING QUIETLY AGAINST THE FENCE... A SAD, BITTER JEFF! FOR AN INSTANT OUR EYES MET, THOUGH WE DIDN'T SAY A WORD!



THEN LARSEN AND I RODE ON, AND I HAD TO FIGHT BACK MY TEARS! I KNEW WHAT JEFF WAS THINKING...



SO YOU'RE RIDING THE TRAIL OF THE PURPLE SAGE WITH SOMEONE ELSE, VICKY... TO THE PLACES THAT ONCE BELONGED TO YOU AND ME ALONE!

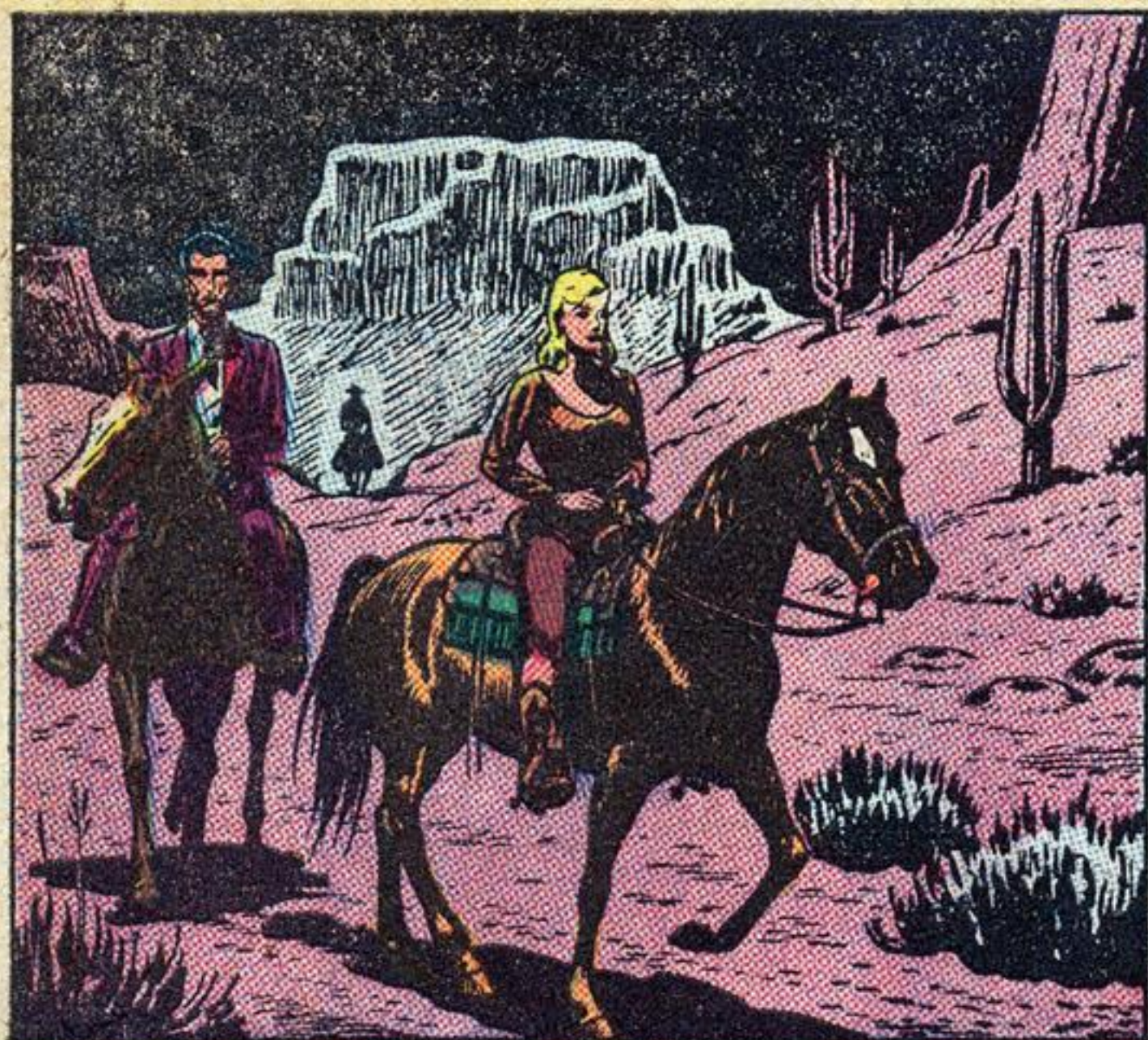
I COULD TELL THAT NOW WE WERE REALLY THROUGH! I WAS PROFANING A SACRED PLACE BY TAKING LARSEN TO THE PURPLE SAGE... AND I WAS PROFANING OUR LOVE!



YOU SEEM VISIBLY AFFECTED SINCE YOU SAW THAT YOUNG MAN! IS HE **YOUR** YOUNG MAN?

NO, HE ISN'T... AND I WASN'T AFFECTED BY ANYONE! COME, LARSEN, OVER THERE IS THE TRAIL OF THE PURPLE SAGE! ONCE IT MEANT MUCH TO ME... NOW I DON'T CARE!

I WAS SILENT AND WITHDRAWN DURING THAT RIDE... I FELT THAT I HAD BETRAYED EVERYTHING THAT I HELD DEAR. LARSEN FOLLOWED, AS SILENT AS I!



I DIDN'T LOOK BACK... IF I HAD, I WOULD HAVE SEEN ANOTHER RIDER FOLLOWING BOTH OF US AS I BLINDLY ROPE TO THE SECRET PLACE KNOWN ONLY TO JEFF AND ME. THEN LARSEN SPURRED HIS HORSE AND CAUGHT UP WITH ME...

THIS IS QUITE A REMOTE SPOT--IT SEEMS FAR AWAY FROM THE WORLD!

IT IS... FAR AWAY... VERY FEW PEOPLE KNOW OF THIS PLACE! SHALL WE GO BACK NOW?



YOU'LL GO BACK WHEN YOUR FATHER PAYS THE DEED TO THE RANCH FOR YOUR RETURN! **MIGUEL!**

SI, SEÑOR!

WHAT?! WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?



MIGUEL, YOU HAVE THE NOTE DEMANDING THE RANCH FOR HER RETURN! TAKE IT AT ONCE TO HER FATHER!

SI, SEÑOR, AT ONCE!

SO! YOU'RE AS CROOKED AND ROTTEN AS I SUSPECTED YOU WERE! YOU'RE NOT KEEPING ME HERE!



I MADE A SUDDEN WILD RUSH TO ESCAPE BUT LARSEN WAS FAST AND STRONG--HE SWEEPED ME OFF MY HORSE, CRUSHED ME TO HIM UNTIL I COULDN'T BREATHE!

YOU'LL STAY HERE--UNTIL I GET THAT MONEY! MEANWHILE, YOU'RE A TASTY DISH AND YOU'LL FIND ME NOT DISAGREEABLE..

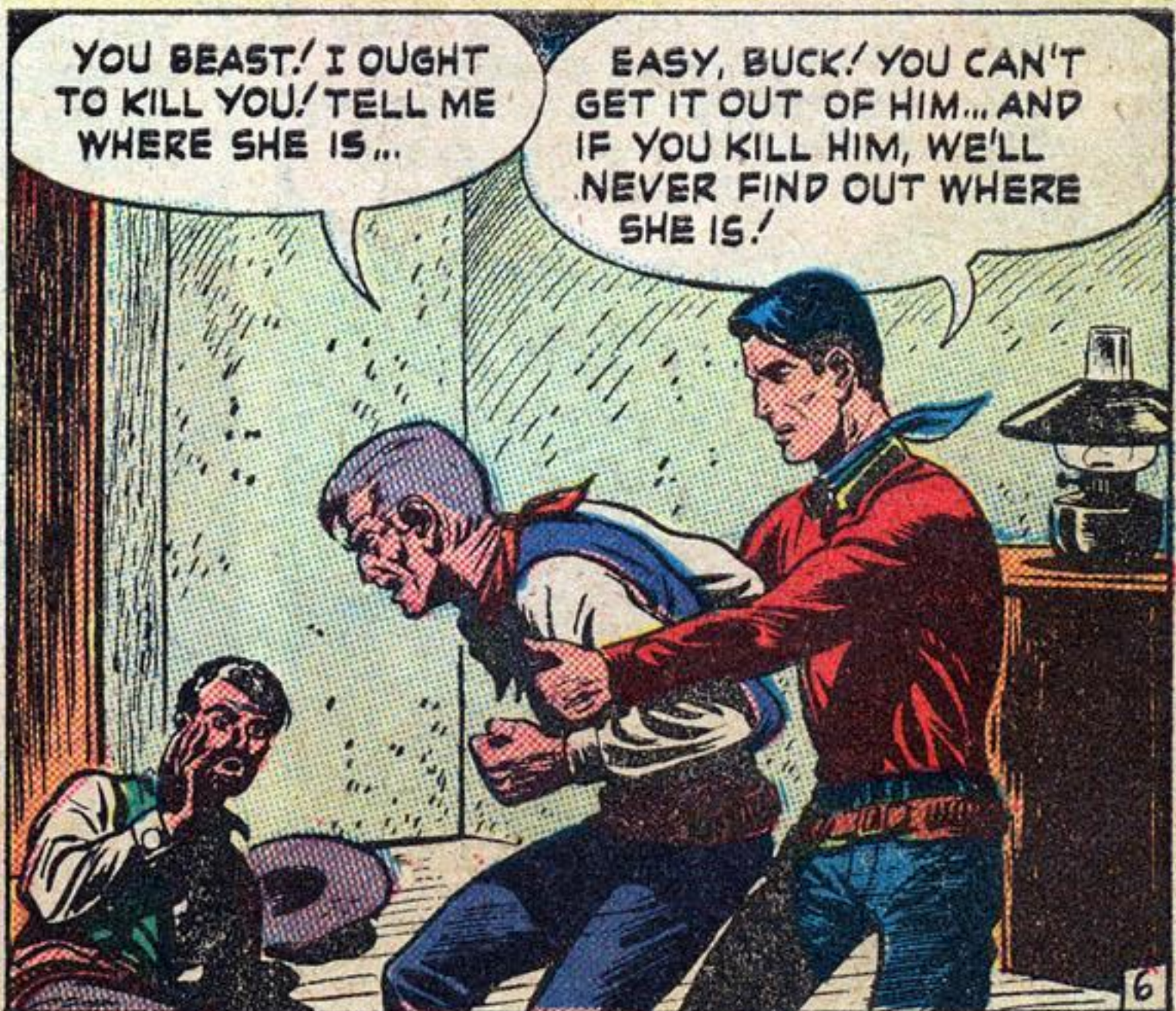
GET AWAY FROM ME! **OH!**



SO I WAS LARSEN'S PRISONER AT THE RENDEZVOUS OF MY LOVE AND JEFF'S. MEANWHILE, MIGUEL DELIVERED THE RANSOM NOTE TO FATHER...

YOU BEAST! I OUGHT TO KILL YOU! TELL ME WHERE SHE IS...

EASY, BUCK! YOU CAN'T GET IT OUT OF HIM... AND IF YOU KILL HIM, WE'LL NEVER FIND OUT WHERE SHE IS!

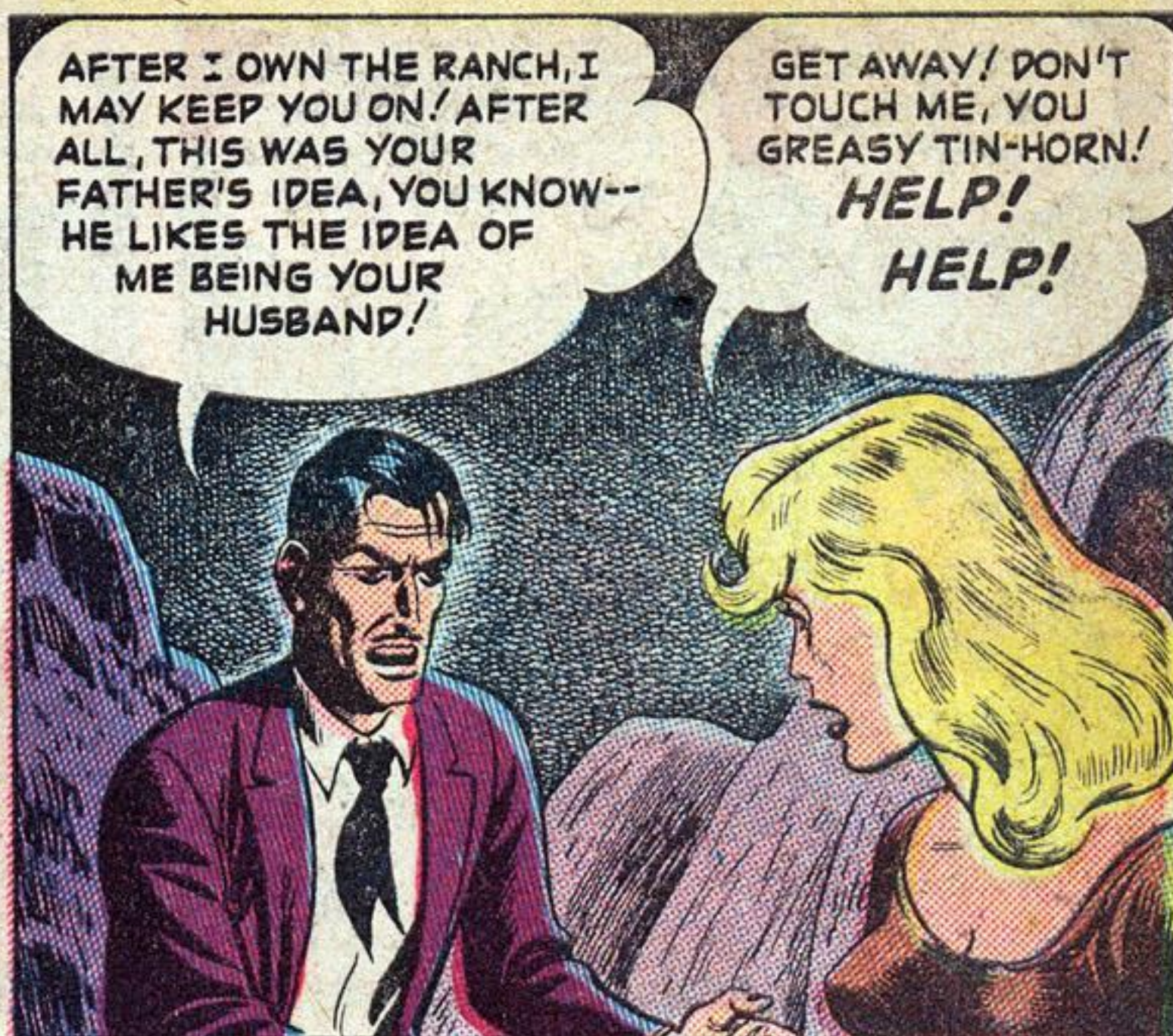




HERE... HERE'S THE DEED! TAKE IT TO THAT SKUNK... ONLY BRING VICKY BACK SAFE!

NO, WAIT A MINUTE... THERE'S STILL A CHANCE... THEY WENT OUT ON THE SAGE! IF VICKY EVER LOVED ME, THERE'S ONLY ONE PLACE SHE'D GO AND THAT'S WHERE LARSEN'S HOLDING HER! LOCK THIS GUY UP-- I'LL BRING HER BACK!

MEANWHILE, FRIGHTENED, I WAS BACKED UP AGAINST A BOULDER AS LARSEN'S EYES GLOWED WITH GREED...



AFTER I OWN THE RANCH, I MAY KEEP YOU ON! AFTER ALL, THIS WAS YOUR FATHER'S IDEA, YOU KNOW-- HE LIKES THE IDEA OF ME BEING YOUR HUSBAND!

GET AWAY! DON'T TOUCH ME, YOU GREASY TIN-HORN! **HELP!** **HELP!**

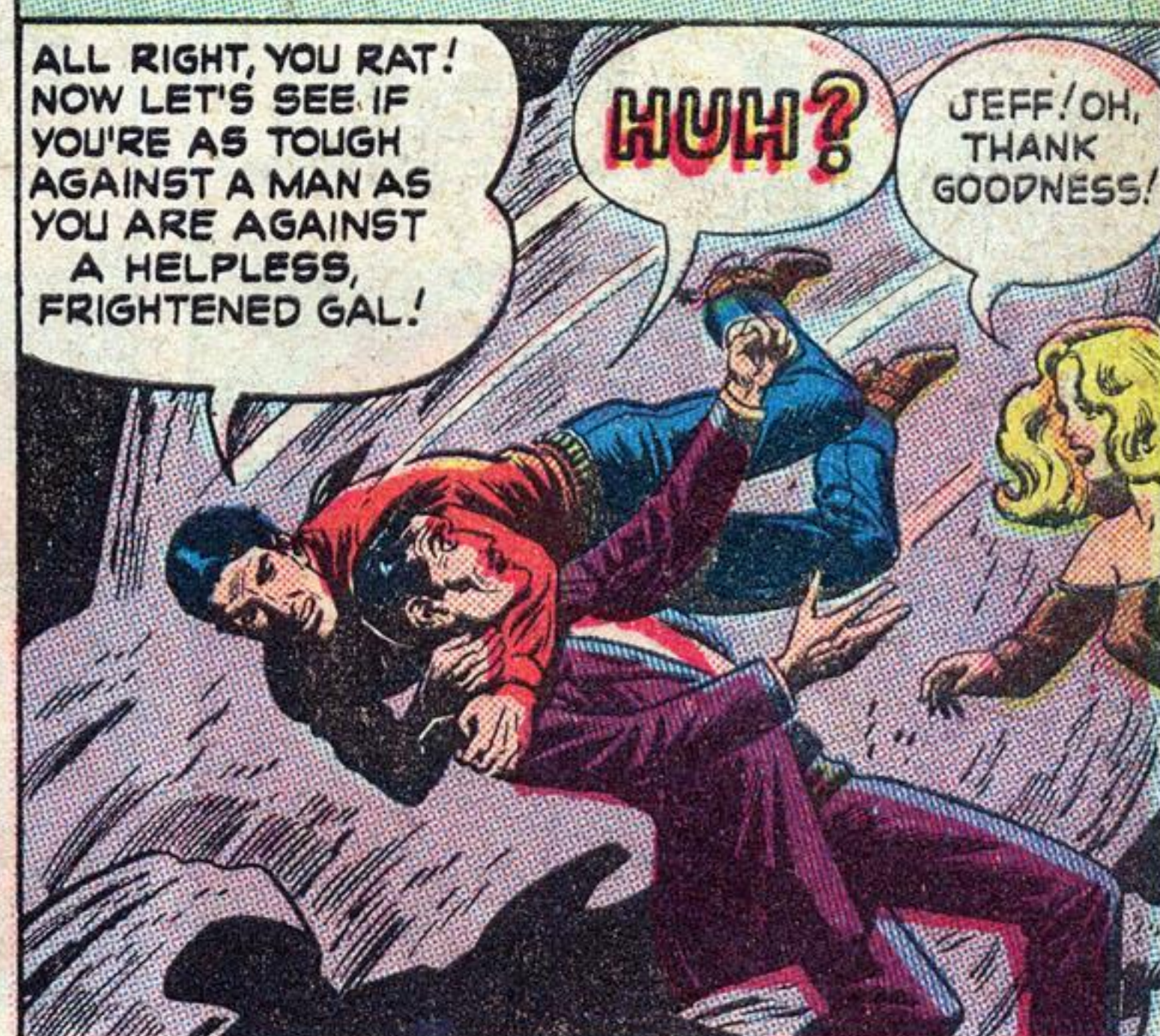
HIS ARMS WERE AROUND ME, HIS LIPS SEARCHING FOR MINE-- I WAS HELPLESS!



GO ON... SCREAM! WE'RE MILES AWAY FROM ANY PLACE AND YOU YOURSELF SAID NO ONE KNOWS WHERE WE ARE! SCREAM! YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL WHEN YOU'RE FRIGHTENED... BEAUTIFUL!

NO!
STOP!
HELP!

SUPPENLY A BLUR FELL FROM ABOVE AND LARSEN WAS SNATCHED AWAY FROM ME!



ALL RIGHT, YOU RAT! NOW LET'S SEE IF YOU'RE AS TOUGH AGAINST A MAN AS YOU ARE AGAINST A HELPLESS, FRIGHTENED GAL!

HUH?

JEFF! OH, THANK GOODNESS!

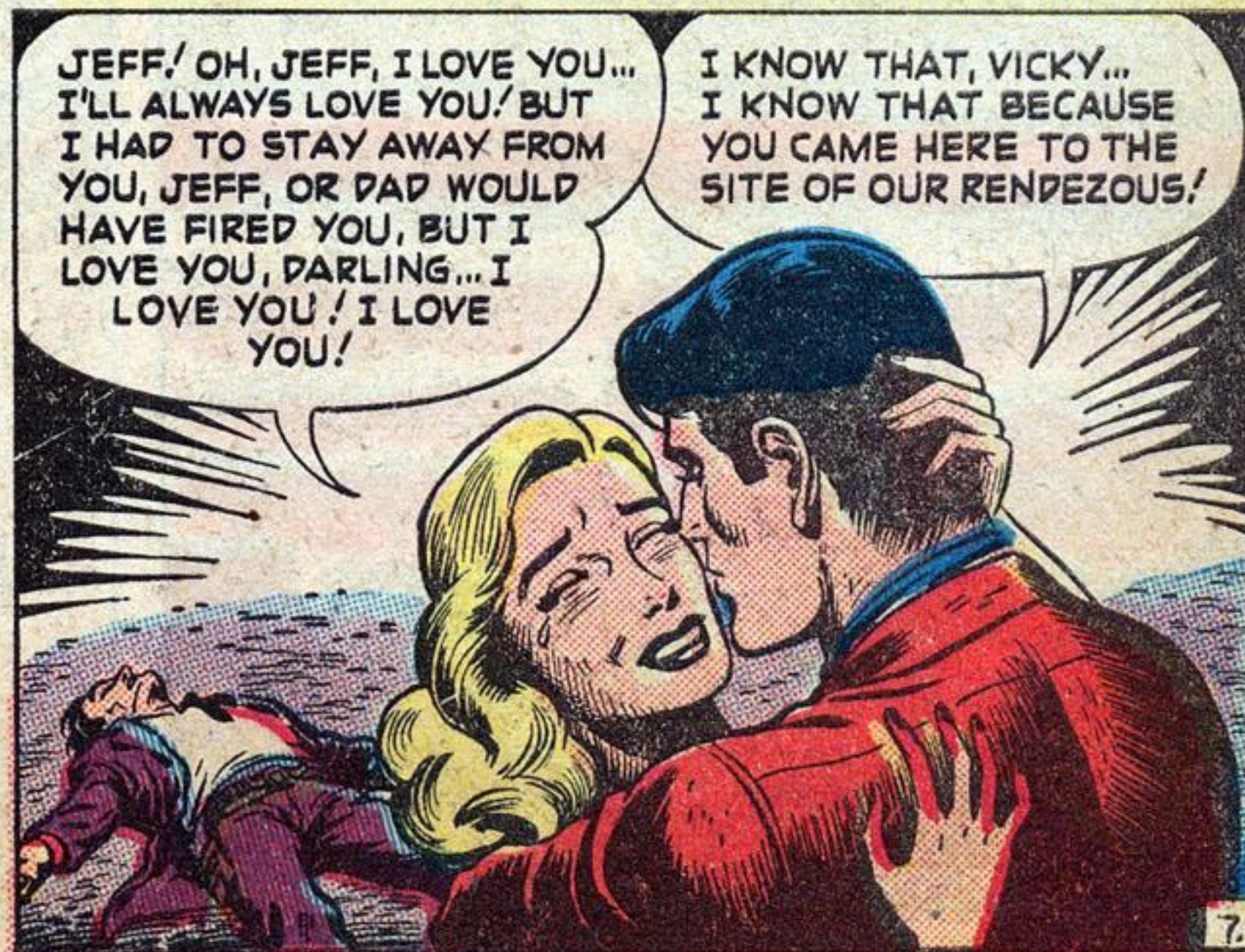
THE BATTLE WAS SHORT BUT VIOLENT! THE BEATING LARSEN'S FACE TOOK FROM JEFF'S FISTS LEFT THE CROOK A HULKING MASS OF LIMP FLESH!



YOU ASKED FOR A KISS... BUT THIS IS MORE LIKE WHAT YOU DESERVE!

UNGH!

THEN IT WAS OVER AND I WAS CLOSE IN JEFF'S ARMS WHERE I BELONGED! SAFE AT LAST, MY HEART SINGING ONCE AGAIN, I POURED OUT THE TRUTH TO HIM!



JEFF! OH, JEFF, I LOVE YOU... I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU! BUT I HAD TO STAY AWAY FROM YOU, JEFF, OR DAD WOULD HAVE FIRED YOU, BUT I LOVE YOU, DARLING... I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!

I KNOW THAT, VICKY... I KNOW THAT BECAUSE YOU CAME HERE TO THE SITE OF OUR RENDEZVOUS!

JEFF TOOK LARSEN BACK AND TURNED HIM AND MIGUEL OVER TO THE SHERIFF! FATHER, OF COURSE, WAS OVERJOYED TO SEE ME.

VICKY, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

YES, DAD, JEFF ARRIVED JUST IN TIME! JEFF, JEFF... WHERE ARE YOU?

HE HADN'T FOLLOWED ME INTO THE HOUSE AFTER THE SHERIFF TOOK THE TWO CROOKS AWAY! NOW FATHER AND I LOOKED OUTSIDE AND THERE HE WAS, HIS PACK ON HIS HORSE, READY TO LEAVE!

JEFF, YOU'RE NOT GOING?

YEAH...WHAT IN SAM HILL DOES THIS MEAN?

I'M LEAVING! I COULDN'T STAND IT ANY LONGER TO BE HERE AND NOT TALK TO VICKY-- IT'S BEST THIS WAY!

YOU'RE NOT GOING ANY PLACE, JEFF CONROY! DO YOU THINK I WANT TO LOSE THE BEST FOREMAN I EVER HAD?

IS THAT ALL, DAD? DON'T YOU WANT TO SAY SOMETHING MORE?

YES I DO! JEFF, IF YOU'LL DO ME THE HONOR OF BEING MY SON-IN-LAW, THEN I'LL BE SURE BOTH VICKY AND MY RANCH WILL BE IN GOOD HANDS! THAT IS... IF YOU AND VICKY CAN EVER FORGIVE A MEDDLING OLD MAN?

YOU BET WE CAN, BUCK!

YOU'D BETTER START CALLING HIM "POP," JEFF!

THAT WAS A FEW YEARS AGO... AND YET JEFF AND I ARE STILL AS ROMANTIC AND AS MUCH IN LOVE! YOU SEE, EVERY TIME WE GET A CHANCE WE RIDE ONCE AGAIN OVER THE TRAIL OF THE PURPLE SAGE HOLDING HANDS AS WE DRINK IN ITS BEAUTY!

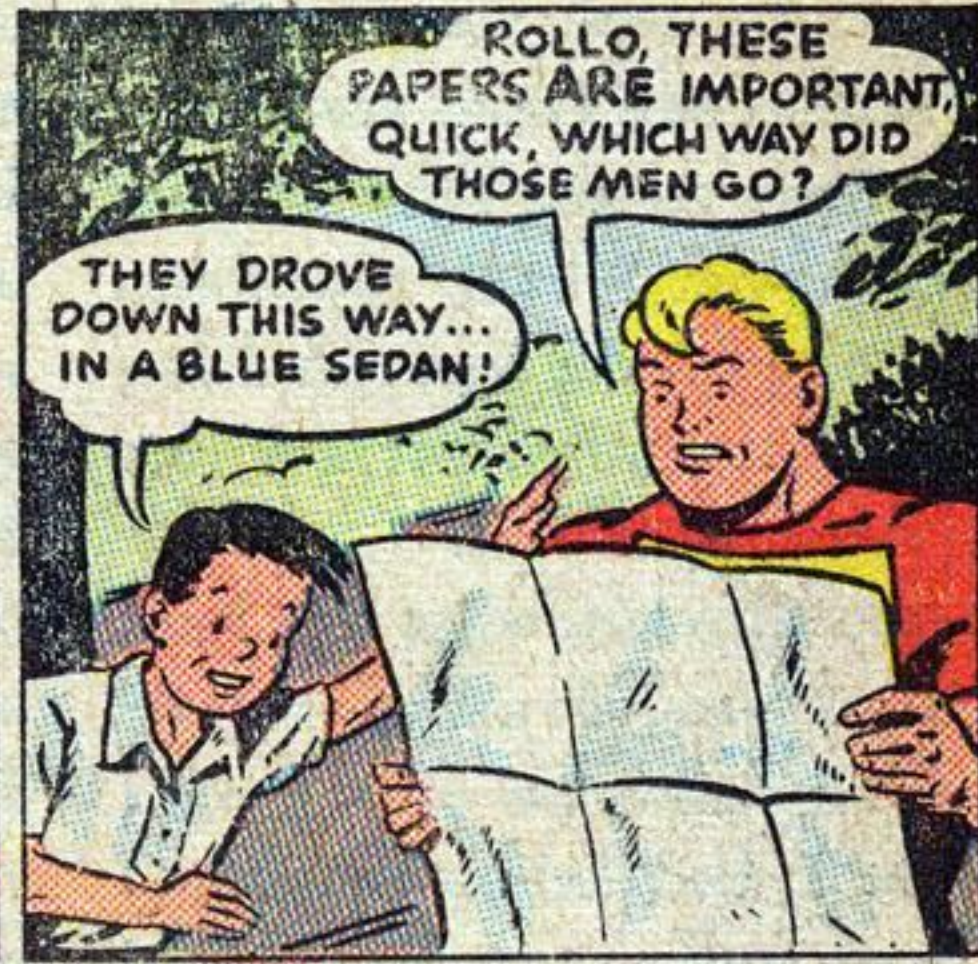
AND THEN, WHEN WE REACH ITS END, WHEN WE COME TO THE PLACE WHERE OUR LOVE FIRST WAS BORN... THERE WE STOP AND, IN OUR OWN WAY, OFFER OUR THANKSGIVING FOR A LOVE THAT WILL NEVER DIE!

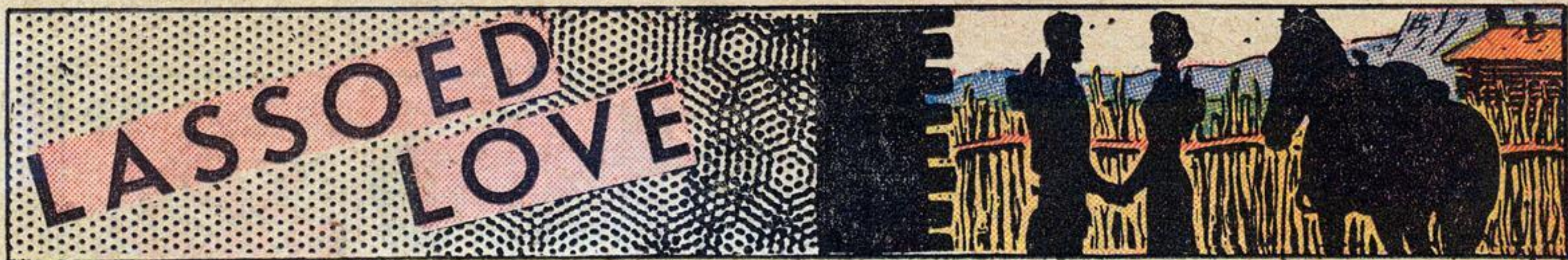
The End

Captain Tootsie

BY BILL SCHREIBER

BREAKS UP SPY RING





I LAY in bed watching the morning sun creep across the floor of my room. This was the day of the big beef round-up, always one of the most exciting events of the year, yet I'd lost all enthusiasm for it.

Jackie Clayton, what has happened to you, I asked myself . . . but I knew the answer well enough. I had fallen in love—and even worse than that, I had fallen in love with an Easterner and a Greenhorn! I remembered how silly Joe had looked when he'd first arrived. He was wearing the newest and flashiest pair of boots I'd ever seen. The boys kept telling him that they were woman's boots until I think he believed it. He went all the way into Fort Collins to buy another pair. No one knew where he'd gotten them—he must have bought them off some cowhand. At least we couldn't kid him about their newness—they were so old they were falling apart at the seams. The boys had really given him a hard time. I remembered when Curley put him on the wildest little stallion on the Bar J Ranch.

"Just keep posting up and down . . . the way you ride a Kentucky saddlemare!" he said. Poor Joe had been thrown clear over the fence in the first three minutes.

I fished around under the bed for my boots, still thinking about Joe. No one had been able to figure out why Dad had signed him on. When I asked him, he admitted to me that he'd liked Joe's enthusiasm. I

think Dad had a soft spot for him because he'd come from the East himself originally, and hadn't even known what a saddle-horn was, at least so he says—but it's hard to believe. He has the finest herd of cattle in Colorado now. I think I must have loved Joe from the very first, though I didn't admit it even to myself. The boys sensed it though.

"Hey Jackie, where are you heading? The greenhorn went that way!" they'd yell whenever they saw me riding alone. I rode the range a lot with Joe, teaching him how to use a lasso, and how to rope a steer. He learned fast, but he never said much. I had a feeling he liked me but he hadn't said anything until last night—and then last night I'd thrown all my chances away. We'd had a cook-out and after chow, and while Curley was strumming on his guitar, Joe came over and sat by me.

"This has been the happiest summer of my life," he said. Then he took my hand and pulled me to my feet. We walked over to the knoll. We didn't say anything about his contract being up after today's round-up. The sky was filled with stars, and I felt all choked up inside. We sat down on the knoll and he put his arms around me.

"Jackie, I never knew a girl like you before. There's so much I want to tell you, but first I want to ask you a pretty important question." I looked up into his dark, smiling eyes, and suddenly I was afraid . . .

afraid of my own heart. Joe was an Easterner, he was going back to the east. I loved the life I led and couldn't give it up, not even for Joe.

I pushed him away and jumped to my feet. "Joe, I have to go back!" I mumbled. He hadn't tried to stop me, he'd just watched me walk back to the campfire.

"Hey Jackie, time to go!" Dad's voice bellowed from downstairs, just as I hitched up my faded levis.

"Well, look what's coming! Sleeping beauty has arisen!" a jeering chorus arose as I walked toward the corral. I ignored the hands as my eyes searched the fence for Joe. He didn't look up. I walked over to Soapy and threw my saddle over her round back. Dad looked a little worried. "Are you sure you'd better ride that critter today, Jackie?" he asked.

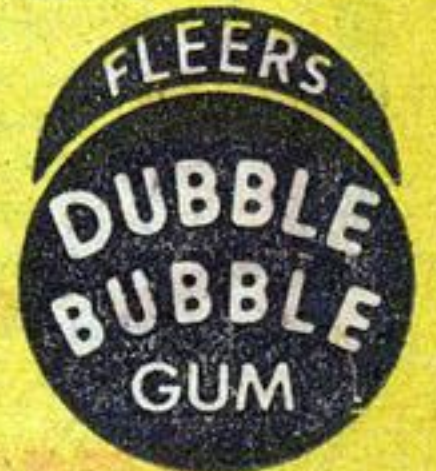
I knew what Dad was thinking. Soapy seemed gentle enough, but there was a crazy streak in her that made her entirely unpredictable. She liked to run, and once she kept running until she tired of it.

At least handling her would keep my mind off Joe, I thought with a savage feeling. I put on her bridle, mounted and rode over to Dad. Joe was watching me.

It's the last day that I'll ever see him, my thoughts kept repeating over and over.

We rode to the far end of the pasture in a compact group, then Dad scattered us. Randy

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT STORY. . .



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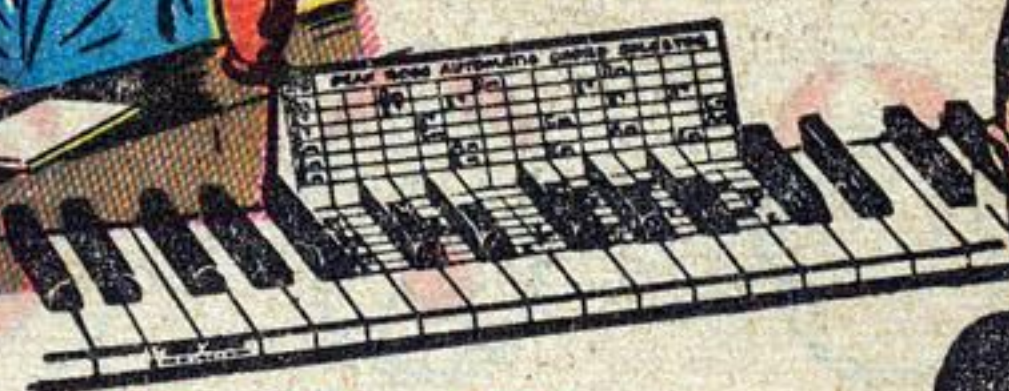
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ALL FURY BREAKS LOOSE WHEN THERE'S A

REDHEAD

ON THE RANGE!



IT WAS THEN I SAW HER... THE BEAUTIFUL RED-HEADED WOMAN... FOR THE FIRST TIME! SHE CAME HURRYING TO BOARD THE STAGE...

IS THIS THE MINERAL WELLS STAGE, DRIVER?

YES, MA'AM! JUMP... ER... GIT IN, MA'AM!



I WAS THE HAPPIEST WOMAN IN THE WEST AS I WALKED TOWARD THE CARSON CITY STAGE! I HAD COME TO CARSON CITY TO BUY MY TROUSSEAU, AND IN A FEW SHORT HOURS WOULD BE BACK IN MINERAL WELLS, AND THE ARMS OF SHERIFF TOM CONWAY, MY FIANCEE!

7175

WE WERE THE ONLY PASSENGERS, SO POLITE CONVERSATION SEEMED IN ORDER! BESIDES, THE RED-HEAD INTRIGUED ME... SHE WAS BOLDLY BEAUTIFUL AND BOLDLY DRESSED... A LITTLE TOO BOLDLY!

I HEARD YOU SAY YOU WERE GOING TO MINERAL WELLS! THAT'S MY HOME TOWN! MY NAME IS JENNIE CORBET-- I RUN THE WELLS BOARDING HOUSE!

I'M FLO VELVET! YES, I'M GOING TO A JOB AS AN ENTERTAINER AT "THE LAST CHANCE" IN MINERAL WELLS! I'M A DANCER!



THAT ABOUT ENDED THE CONVERSATION! THE LAST CHANCE WAS A DANCE HALL AND SALOON RUN BY ACES BIXBY, THE MAN WHO CONTROLLED THE SHADIER ELEMENT OF THE TOWN... IT WOULDN'T BE QUITE THE THING FOR THE SHERIFF'S FIANCEE TO BECOME FRIENDLY WITH A WOMAN OF THAT STRATA OF SMALL TOWN SOCIETY!

WE'LL BE SIGHTIN' MINERAL WELLS IN A FEW MINUTES, LADIES!



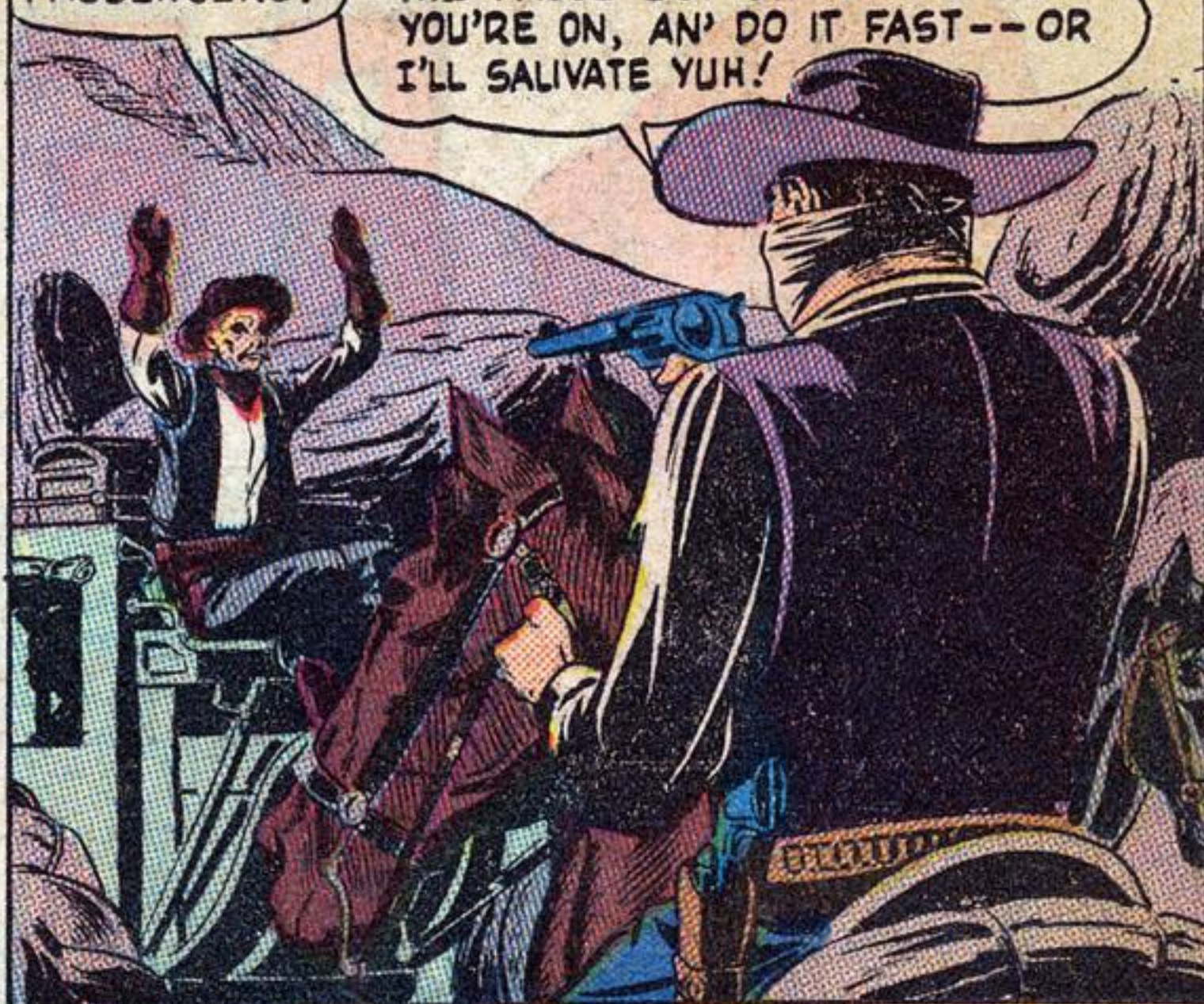
SUDDENLY A SHOT RANG OUT AND THE GUARD'S FACE BECAME SLACK, HIS EYES GLAZED OVER, AND HE FELL TO THE ROAD AS THE STAGE JERKED TO A STOP!

HAUL IN YER REINS, DRIVER-- AN' THROW OUT THE STRONGBOX!

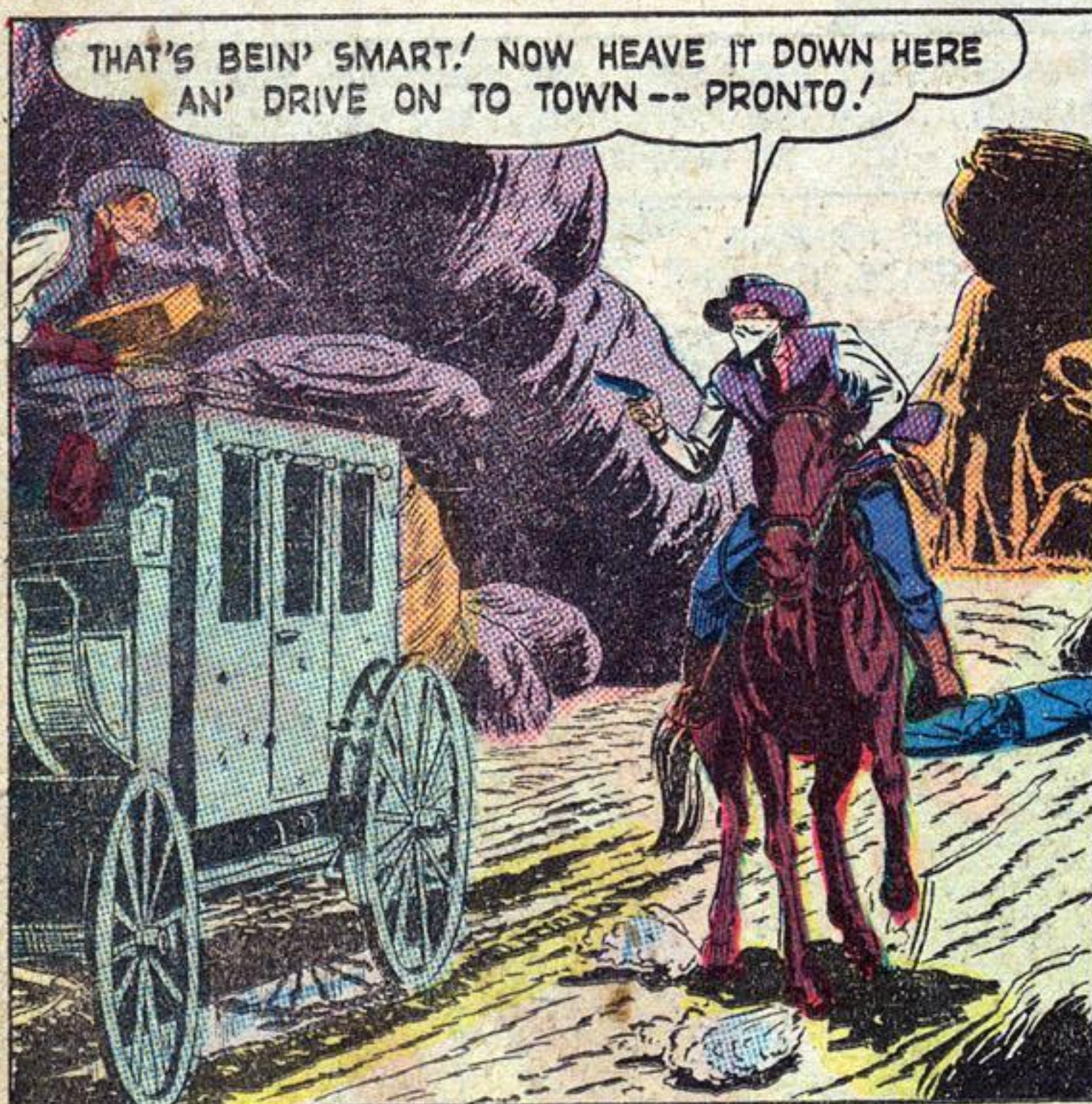


WE AIN'T GOT NO STRONGBOX! ALL WE GOT IS PASSENGERS!

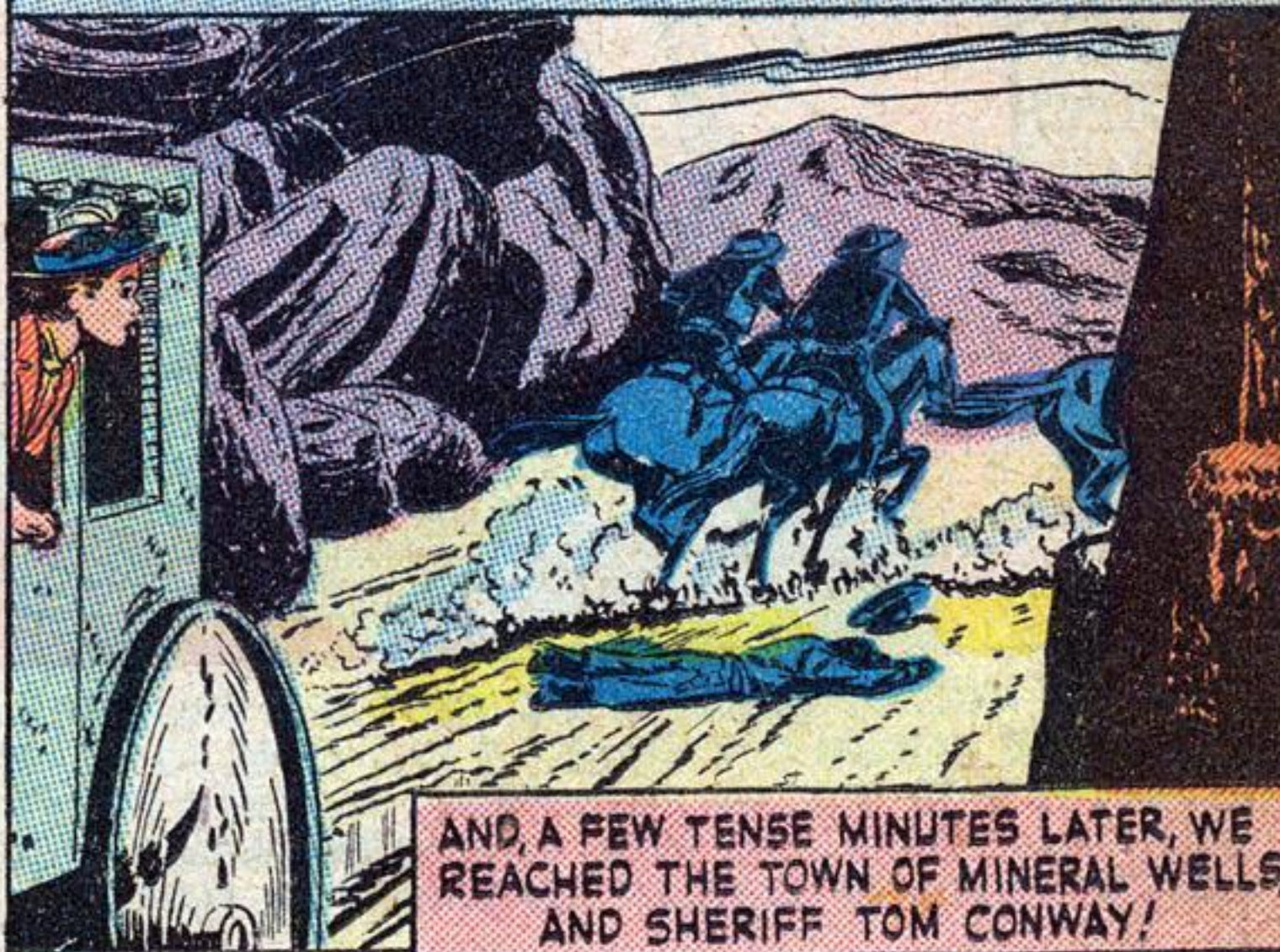
DON'T LIE, OR YOU'LL JOIN YOUR PARTNER! GET OUT THAT WELLS FARGO GOLD YOU'RE CARRYIN' IN THE FALSE BOTTOM OF THE SEAT YOU'RE ON, AN' DO IT FAST-- OR I'LL SALIVATE YUH!



THAT'S BEIN' SMART! NOW HEAVE IT DOWN HERE AN' DRIVE ON TO TOWN-- PRONTO!

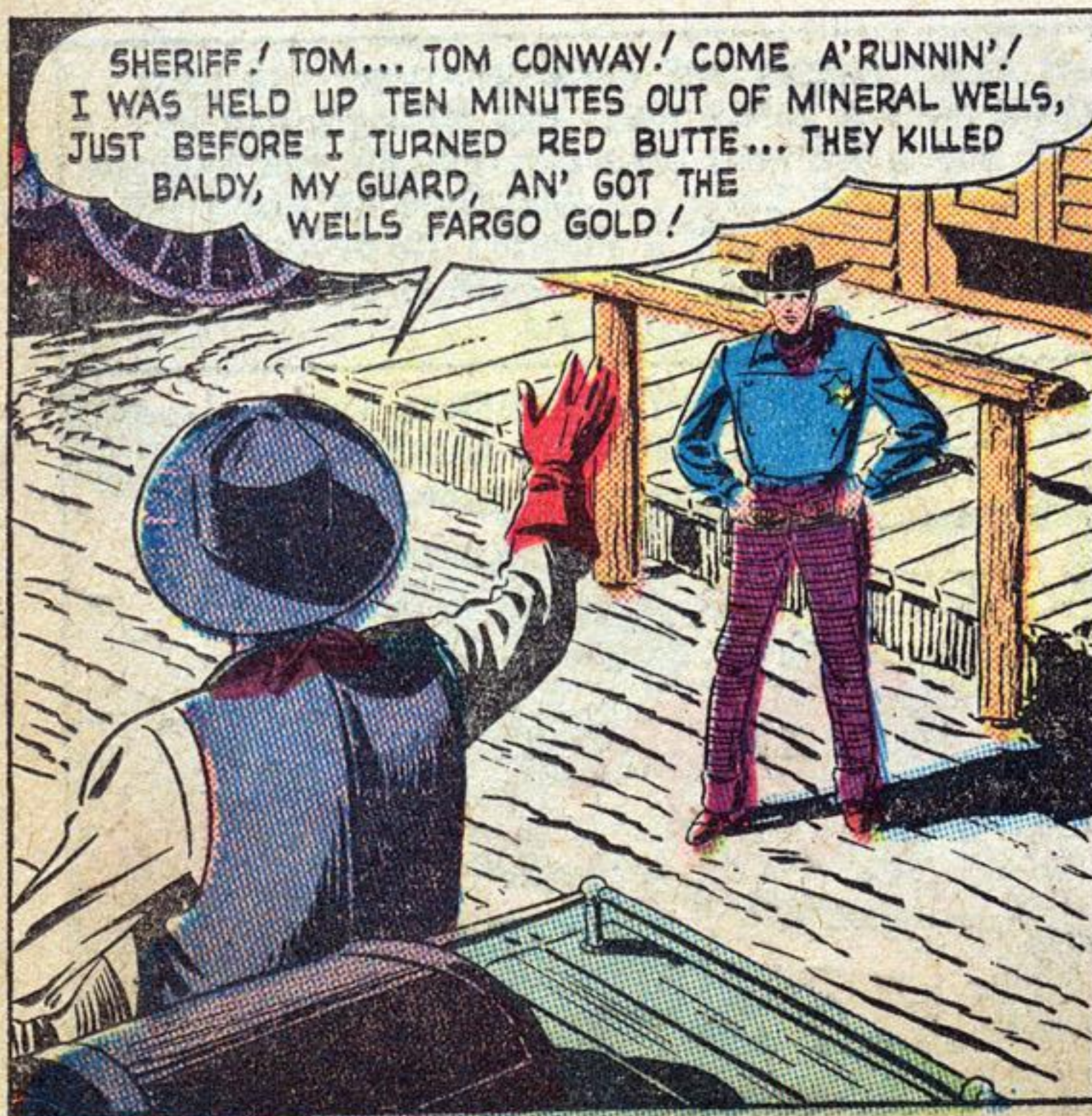


THE DRIVER CURSED AND THREW THE BOX TO THE ROAD, THEN WHIPPED UP THE HORSES AT A COMMAND FROM THE MASKED MAN AND DROVE TOWARD TOWN. I LOOKED BACK AND SAW THE MASKED MEN VANISHING BEHIND THE ROCKS WITH THE STRONGBOX, LEAVING THE BODY OF THE DEAD GUARD LYING ON THE DUSTY ROAD!



AND A FEW TENSE MINUTES LATER, WE REACHED THE TOWN OF MINERAL WELLS, AND SHERIFF TOM CONWAY!

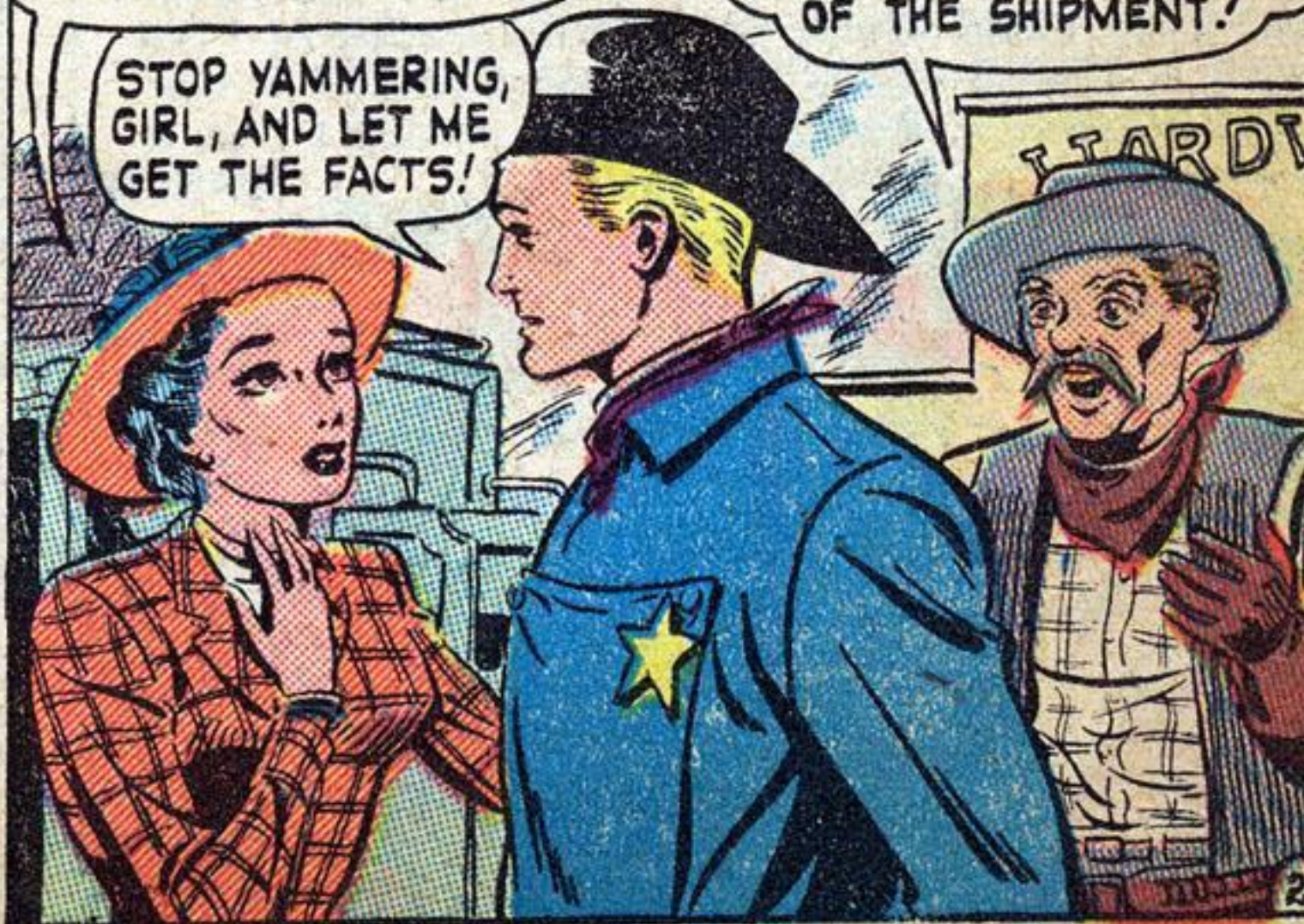
SHERIFF! TOM... TOM CONWAY! COME A'RUNNIN'! I WAS HELD UP TEN MINUTES OUT OF MINERAL WELLS, JUST BEFORE I TURNED RED BUTTE... THEY KILLED BALDY, MY GUARD, AN' GOT THE WELLS FARGO GOLD!



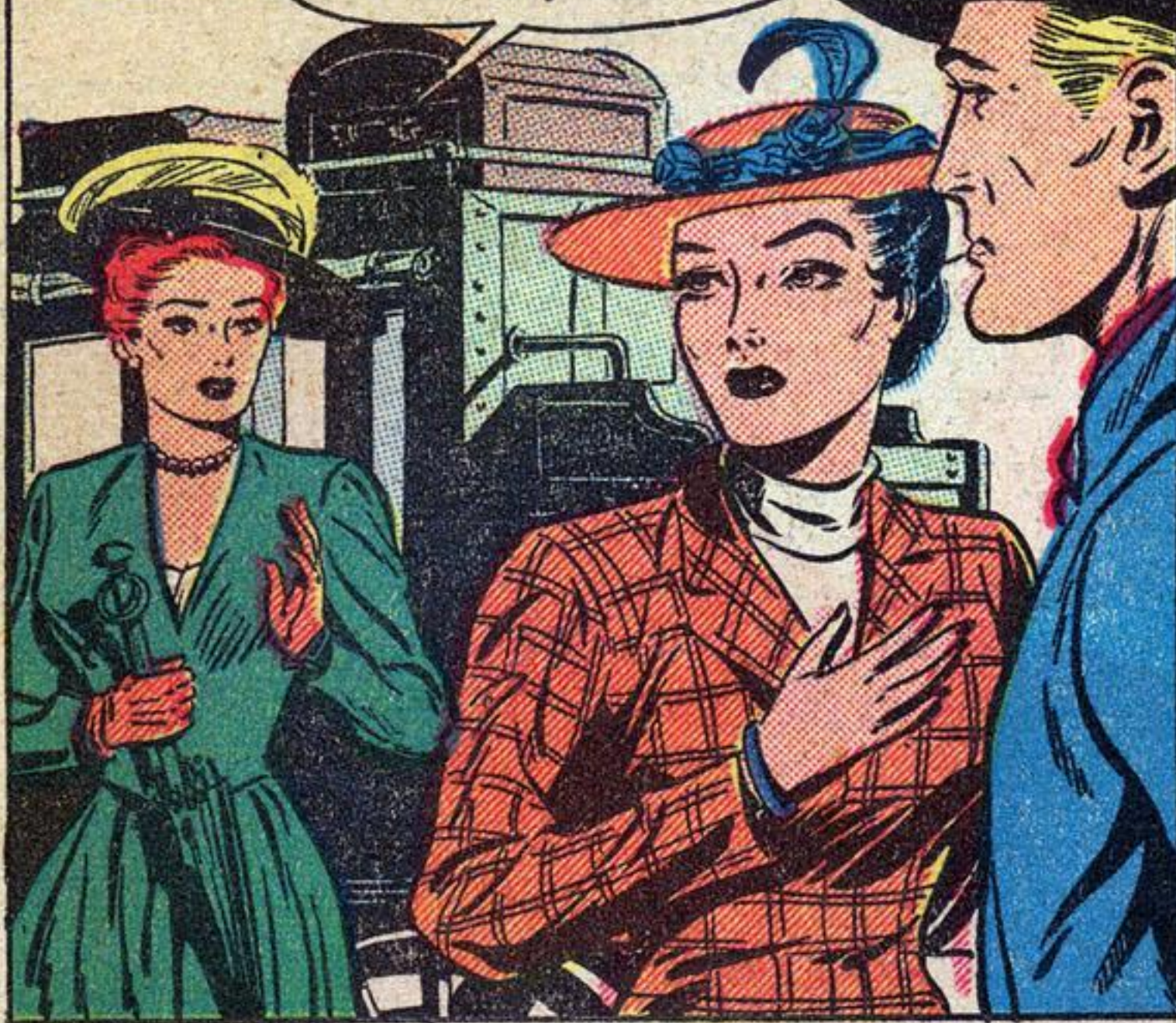
OH, TOM, IT WAS TERRIBLE! I WAS SO HAPPY, THINKING OF OUR MARRIAGE... AND WITH THE CLOTHES I BOUGHT... THAT DRESS, TOO, THAT YOU SAW IN CARSON CITY AND WANTED ME TO HAVE ... THEN THIS HAPPENED!

THEY KNEW I HAD THE GOLD... HOW, I DON'T KNOW! IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE KEPT QUIET-- ONLY THE WELLS FARGO AGENT AN' ME WERE SUPPOSED TO KNOW OF THE SHIPMENT!

STOP YAMMERING, GIRL, AND LET ME GET THE FACTS!



MISS CORBET, I'M GOING TO PUT UP AT YOUR BOARDING HOUSE! THIS HOLDUP HAS BEEN AN ORDEAL... IT WAS AWFUL, SHERIFF!



I DIDN'T LIKE THE LOOK IN TOM'S EYES AS HE WATCHED FLO VELVET WALK TOWARD THE BOARDING HOUSE! HE WAS INTERESTED...AND EXCITED!

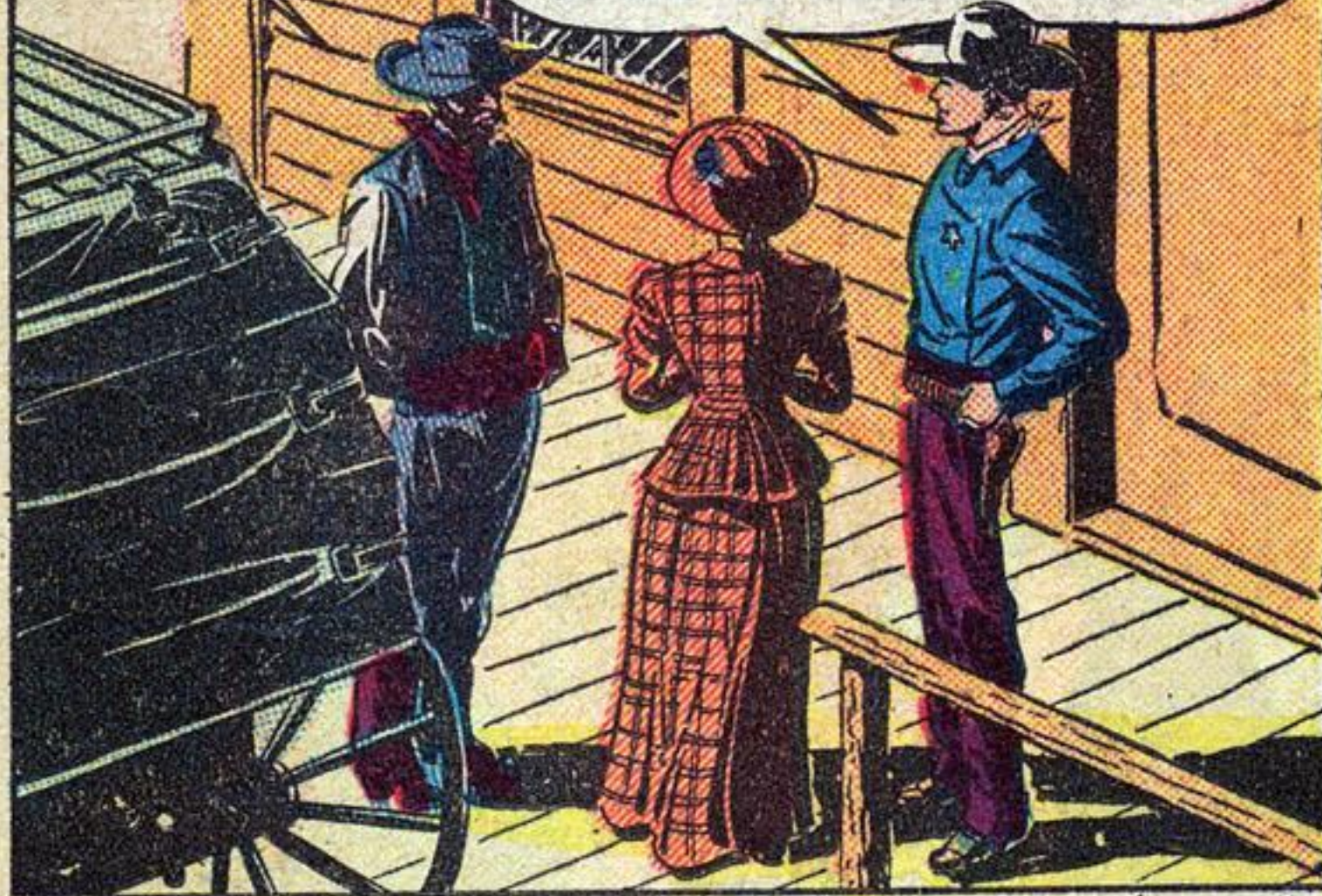
WHO IS SHE? WHAT'S SHE DOING HERE IN MINERAL WELLS?

HER NAME IS FLO VELVET, A DANCER, AND SHE CAME FROM CARSON CITY TO TAKE A JOB DANCING AT ACE BIXBY'S PLACE!

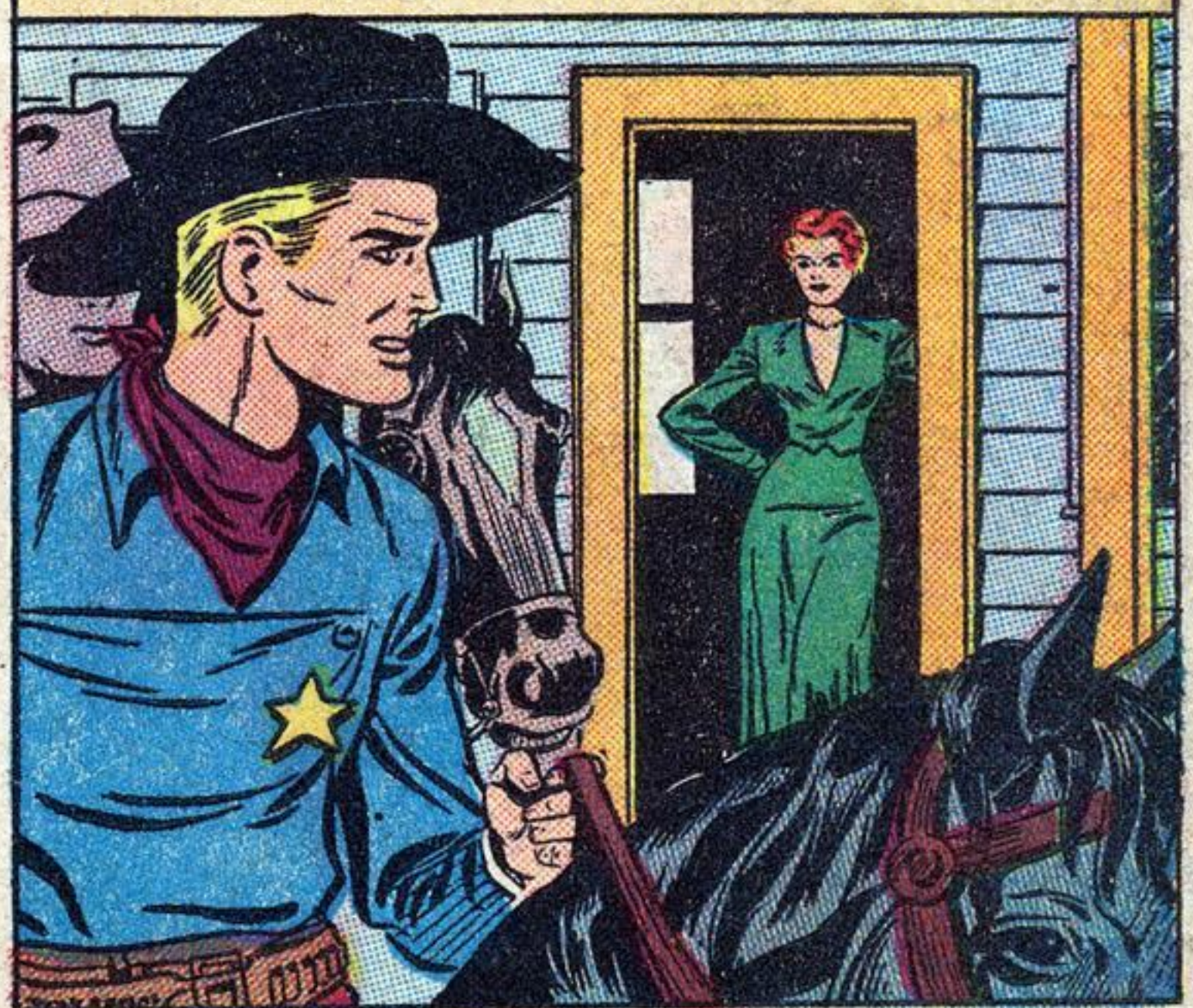


HEY, TOM, AIN'T YOU GOIN' TO FORM A POSSE AN' GET AFTER THEM MASKED JASPERS?

SURE, BUT I DON'T EXPECT IT TO DO ANY GOOD! HOLDIN' THE STAGE UP SO CLOSE TO TOWN MAKES ME BELIEVE THAT THE BANDITS ARE LOCAL MEN--WHOEVER THEY ARE, THEY'RE PROBABLY BACK IN TOWN BY NOW WITH ALIBIS TO PROVE THAT THEY NEVER LEFT MINERAL WELLS!



TOM FORMED A POSSE AND RODE OUT! AS HE PASSED THE BOARDING HOUSE HE TURNED HIS HEAD AND SMILED... FLO VELVET STOOD IN THE DOORWAY!



IT WAS DUSK BY THE TIME TOM AND THE POSSE RETURNED... HE CAME TO MY PLACE AS SOON AS HE HAD WASHED!

AND JUST AS I FIGGERED, THERE WASN'T A SIGN OF TRACKS ONCE THOSE BANDITS GOT INTO THE BRUSH! LOOKED LIKE THEY WERE CIRCLIN' TO COME BACK INTO MINERAL WELLS! ABOUT THAT NEW GIRL-- YOU SAY SHE'S WORKIN' FOR ACES BIXBY?

THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID! SAY, FOR A MAN WHO'S GOIN' TO BE MARRIED IN A SHORT TIME, YOU SURE ARE TAKIN' QUITE AN INTEREST IN AN- OTHER WOMAN!



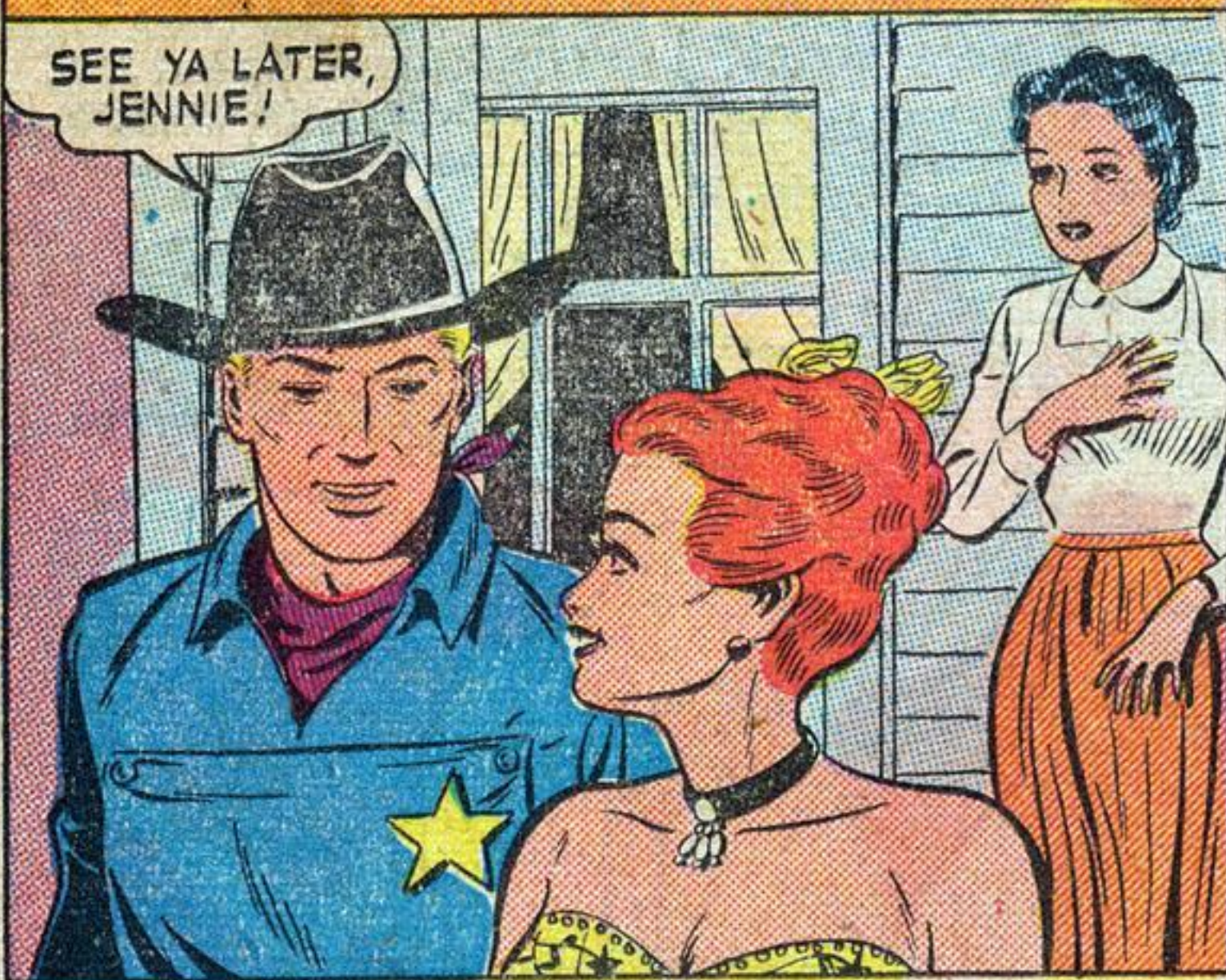
GUESS I'LL REPORT FOR MY FIRST EVENING'S WORK! FIND ANY SIGNS OF THE BANDITS, SHERIFF?

NOPE, NOT A SIGN! WAIT A MINUTE... I'LL WALK OVER WITH YOU, FLO!



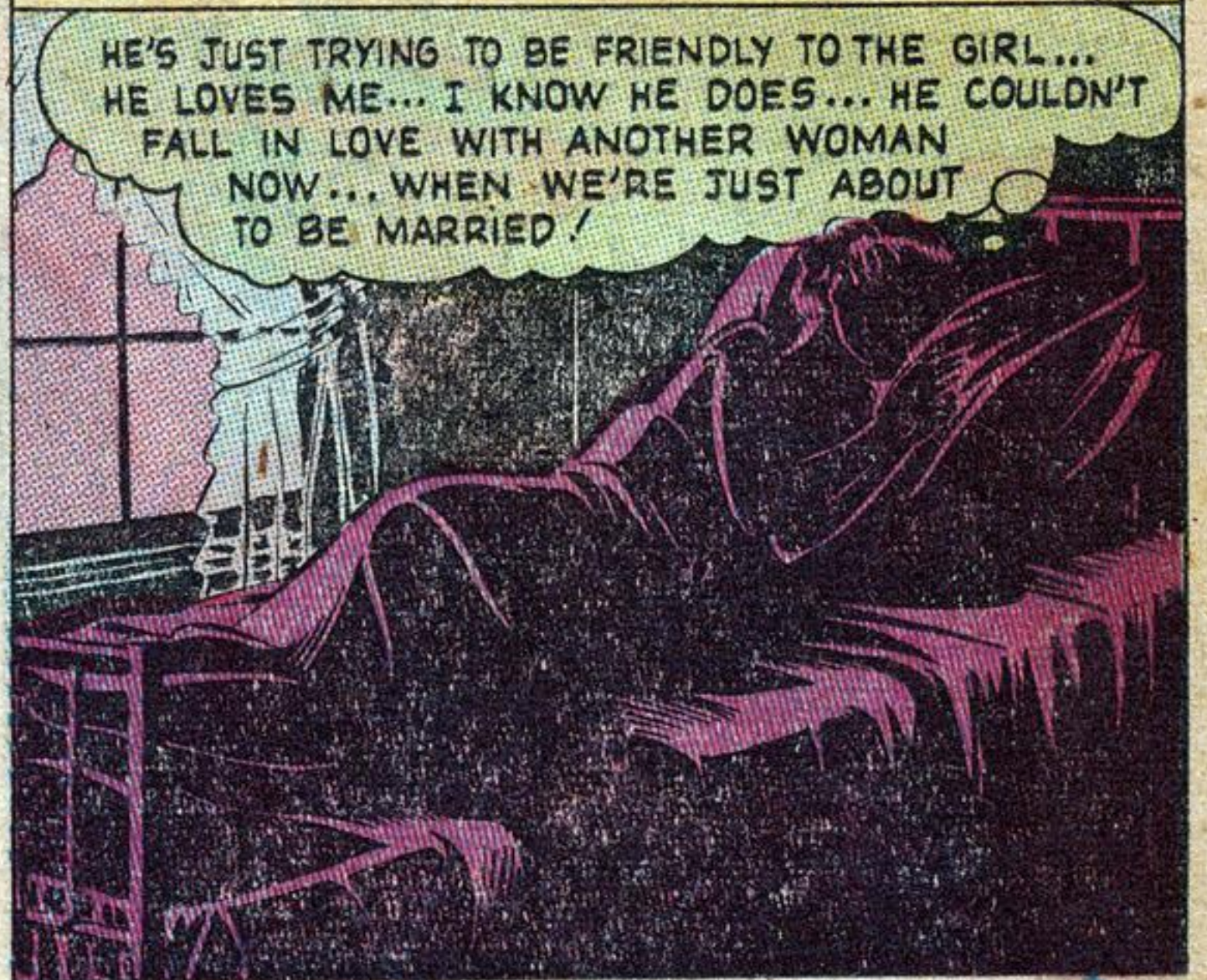
I WATCHED THEM AS THEY WENT OUT... TOM HAD TAKEN HER ARM, LEANED CLOSE AND WHISPERED SOMETHING, AND SHE SMILED UP AT HIM! I KNEW OUTWARDLY I APPEARED CALM AND SELF-CONTAINED, BUT INSIDE ME THERE WAS TORMENT!

SEE YA LATER, JENNIE!



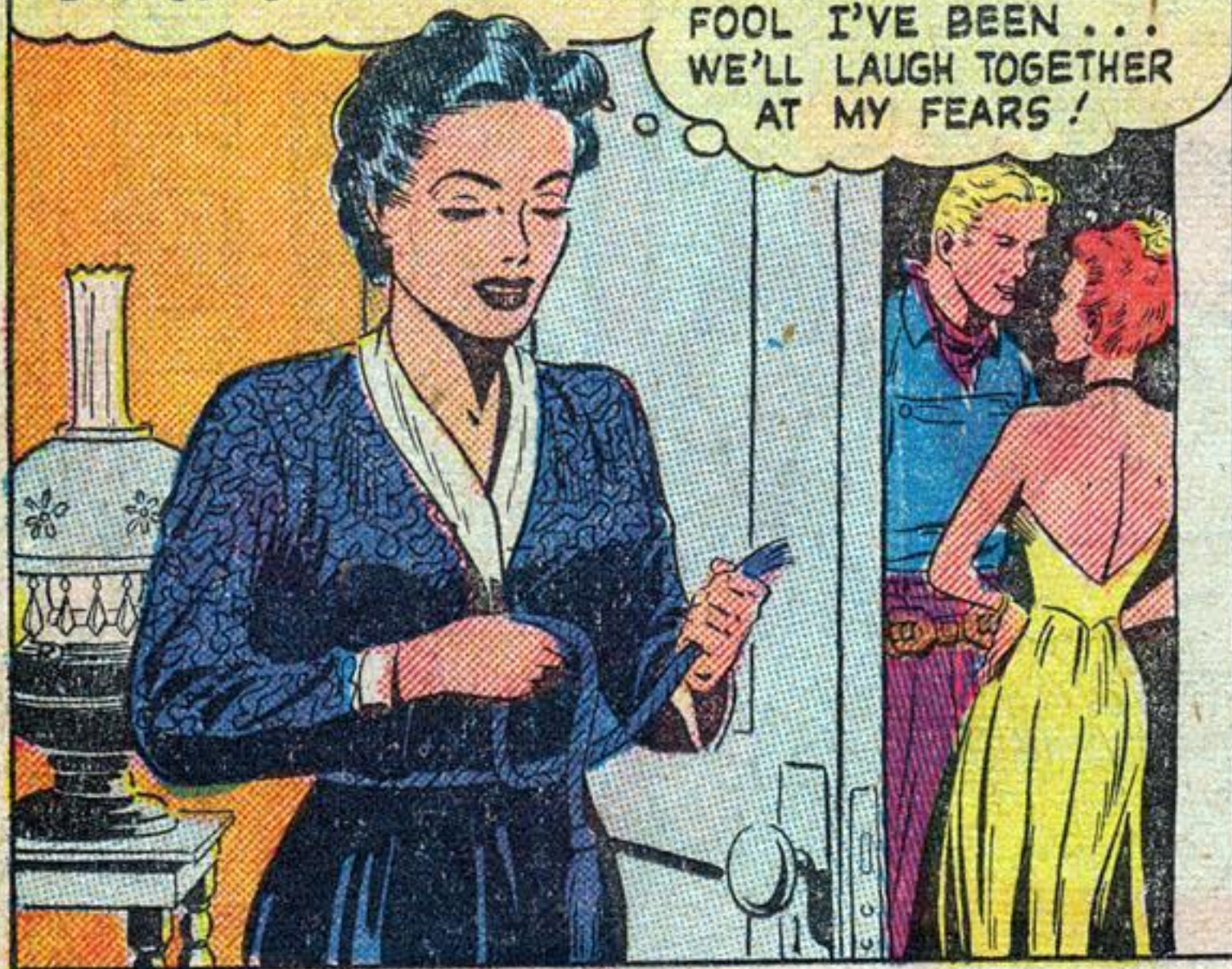
TOM DIDN'T COME BACK, THOUGH I WAITED! FINALLY I WENT TO MY ROOM! AS THE HOURS PASSED IN SLEEPLESSNESS, I TRIED TO THINK CALMLY... TO RE-ASSURE MYSELF OF TOM'S FIDELITY!

HE'S JUST TRYING TO BE FRIENDLY TO THE GIRL... HE LOVES ME... I KNOW HE DOES... HE COULDN'T FALL IN LOVE WITH ANOTHER WOMAN NOW... WHEN WE'RE JUST ABOUT TO BE MARRIED!



EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTED, I WAS ABOUT TO SLEEP... WHEN I HEARD A VOICE OUTSIDE IN THE HALL... TOM'S VOICE!

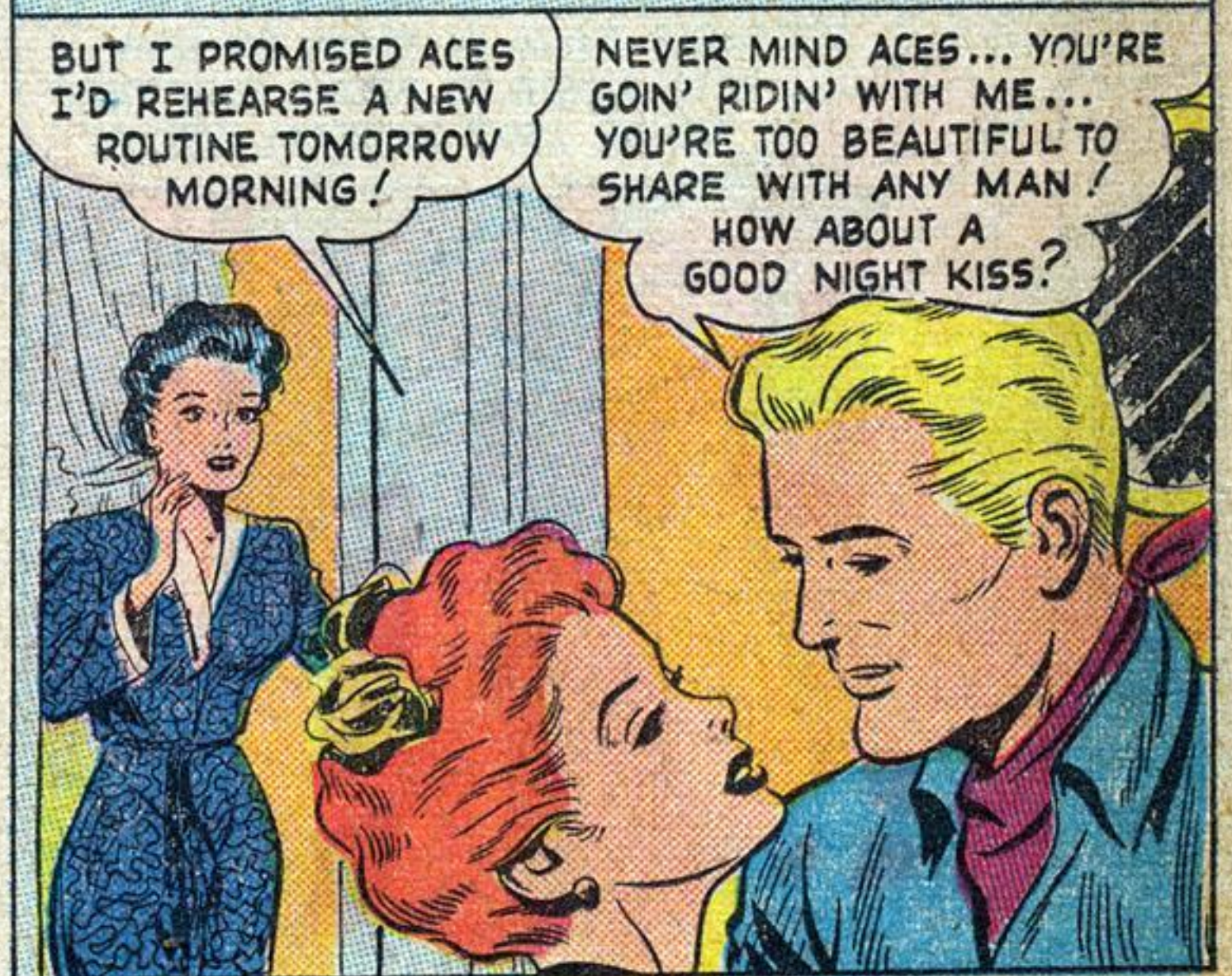
I'LL GO TO TOM AND TELL HIM WHAT A JEALOUS LITTLE FOOL I'VE BEEN... WE'LL LAUGH TOGETHER AT MY FEARS!



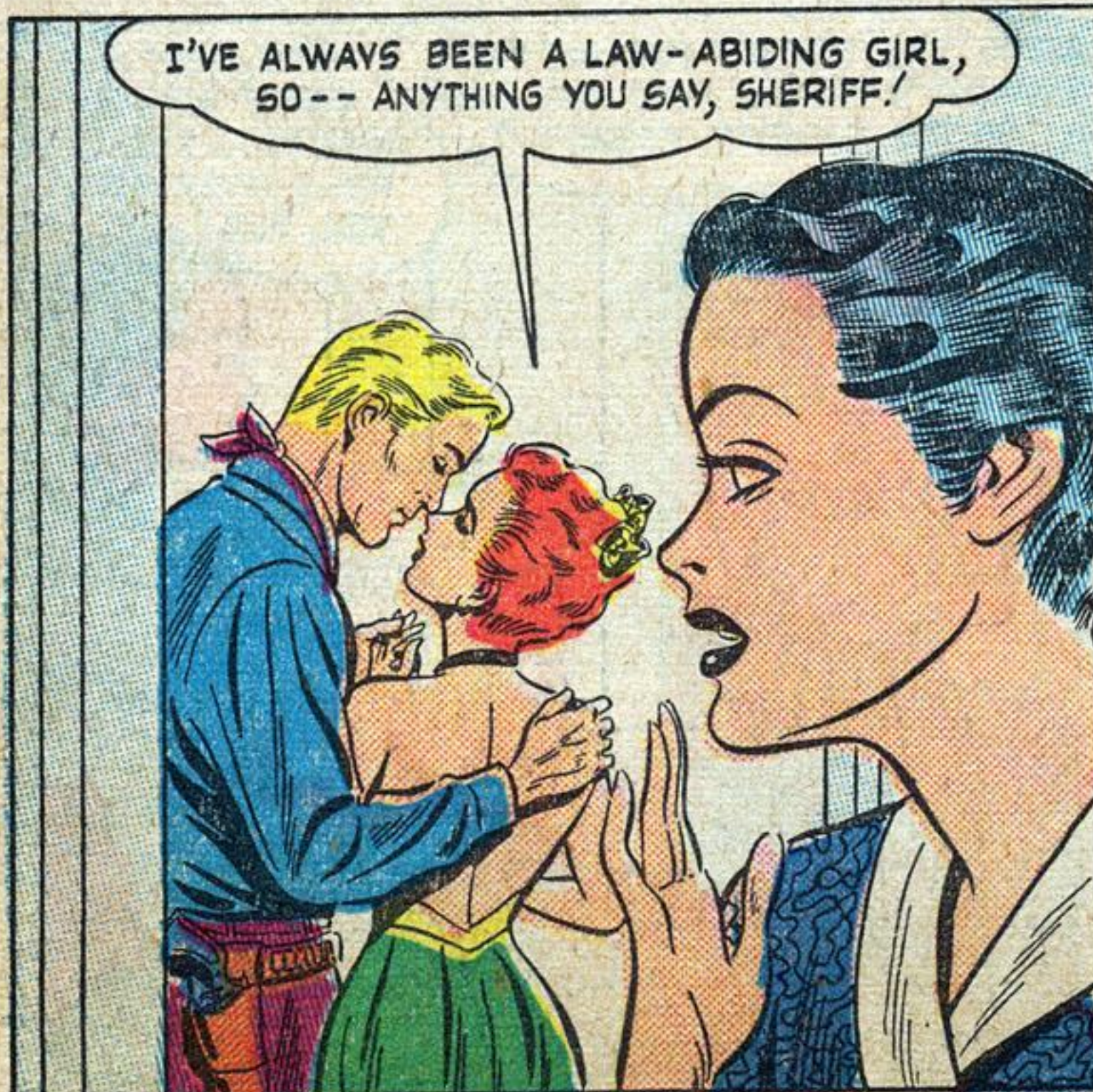
DISMISSING MY DOUBTS WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT I WOULD SOON BE IN THE SOOTHING COMFORT OF TOM'S ARMS, I OPENED THE DOOR! THERE WAS TOM -- WITH *THAT REDHEAD*!

BUT I PROMISED ACES I'D REHEARSE A NEW ROUTINE TOMORROW MORNING!

NEVER MIND ACES... YOU'RE GOIN' RIDIN' WITH ME... YOU'RE TOO BEAUTIFUL TO SHARE WITH ANY MAN! HOW ABOUT A GOOD NIGHT KISS?



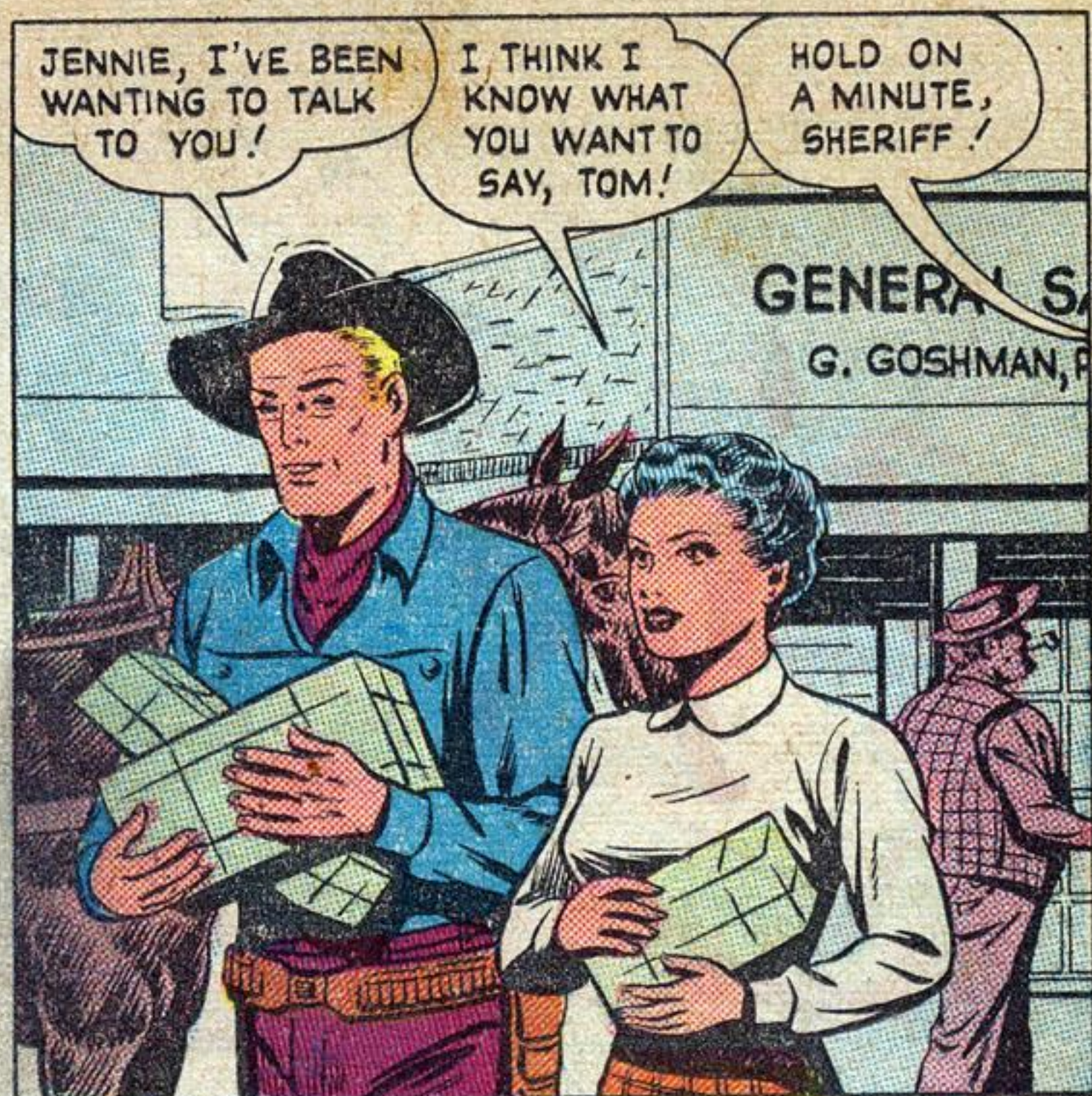
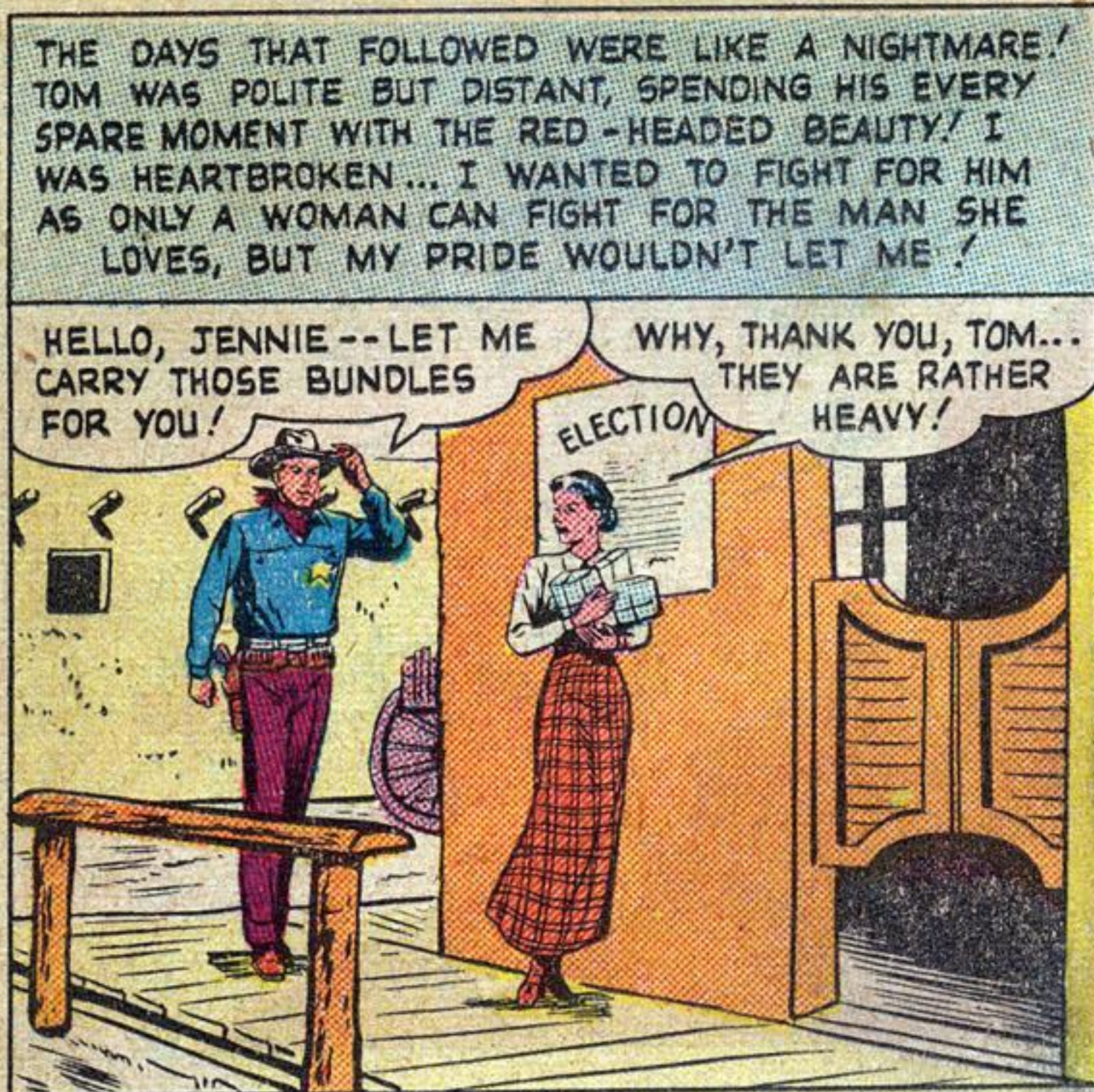
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A LAW-ABIDING GIRL, SO -- ANYTHING YOU SAY, SHERIFF!



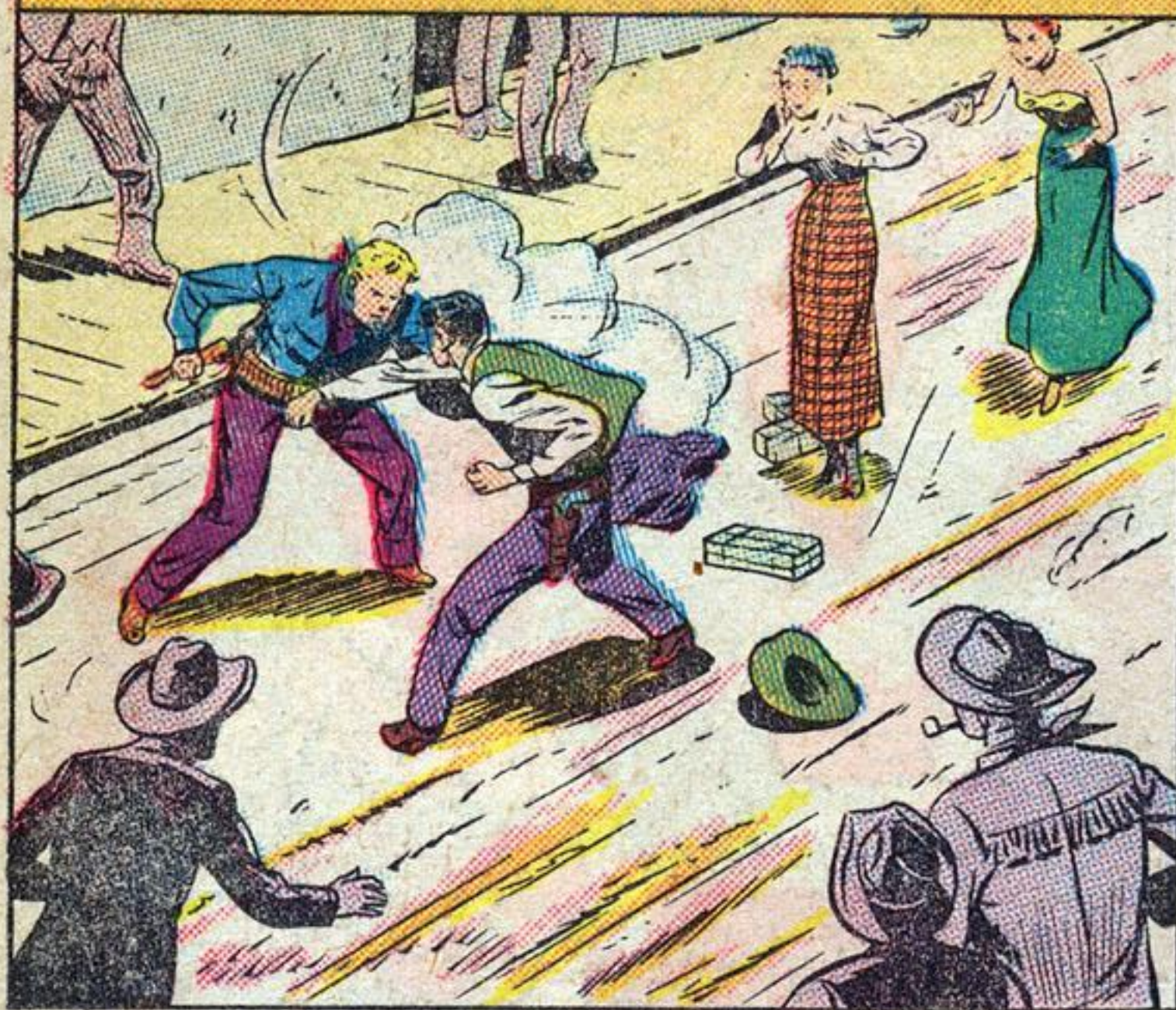
I SHUT THE DOOR, BLOTING OUT THE SIGHT THAT SEARED MY HEART... BLOTING OUT MY FUTURE... LEFT ONLY WITH A HEARTFUL OF MEMORIES!

OH, TOM... TOM, I'D NEVER BELIEVE IT... BUT I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES!

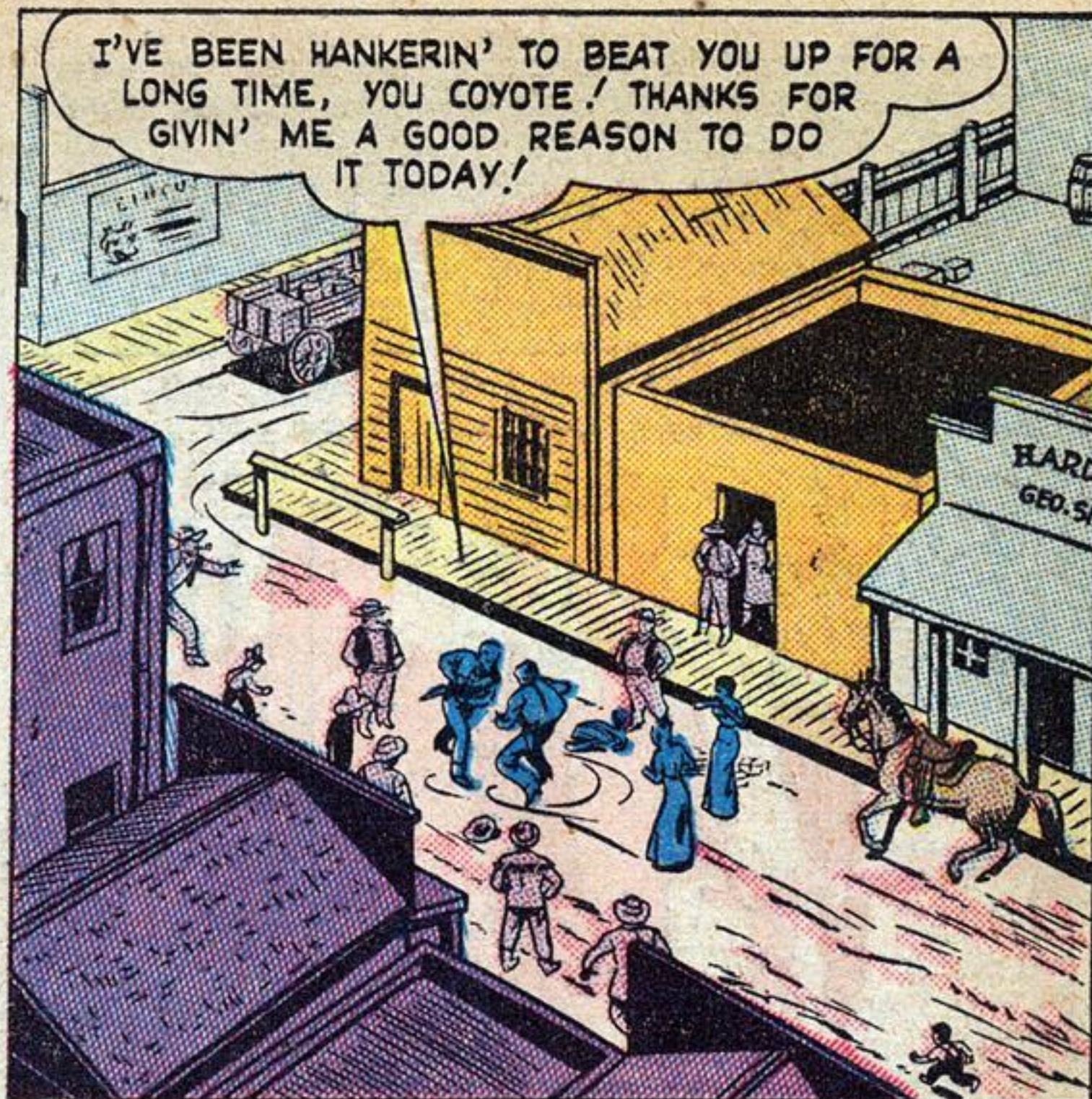




I STOOD THERE HORRIFIED, WATCHING WHILE TOM -- MY TOM -- BRAWLED IN THE STREET WITH THIS LOW GAMBLER OVER THE FAVORS OF A DANCE HALL GIRL!

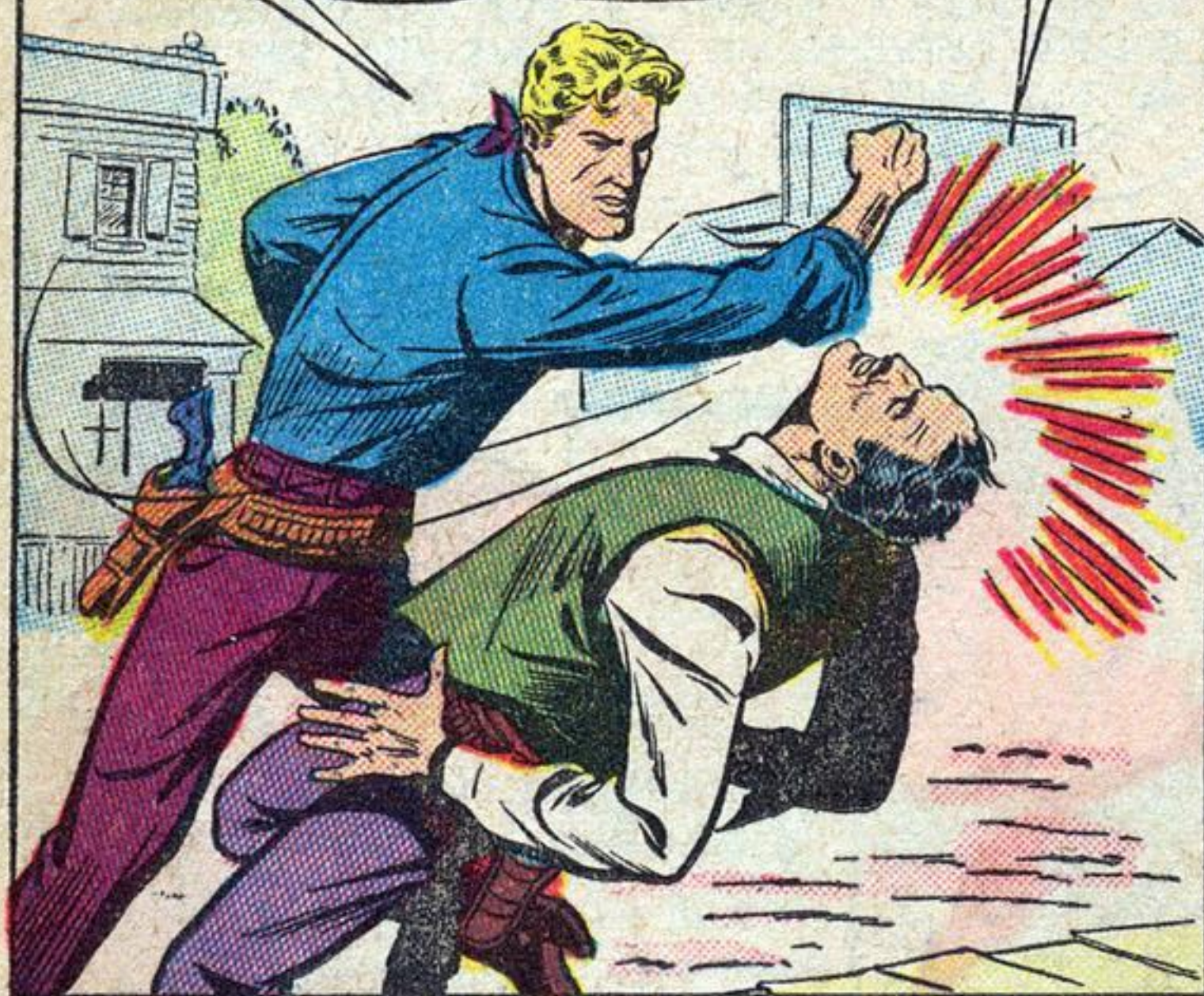


I'VE BEEN HANKERIN' TO BEAT YOU UP FOR A LONG TIME, YOU COYOTE! THANKS FOR GIVIN' ME A GOOD REASON TO DO IT TODAY!



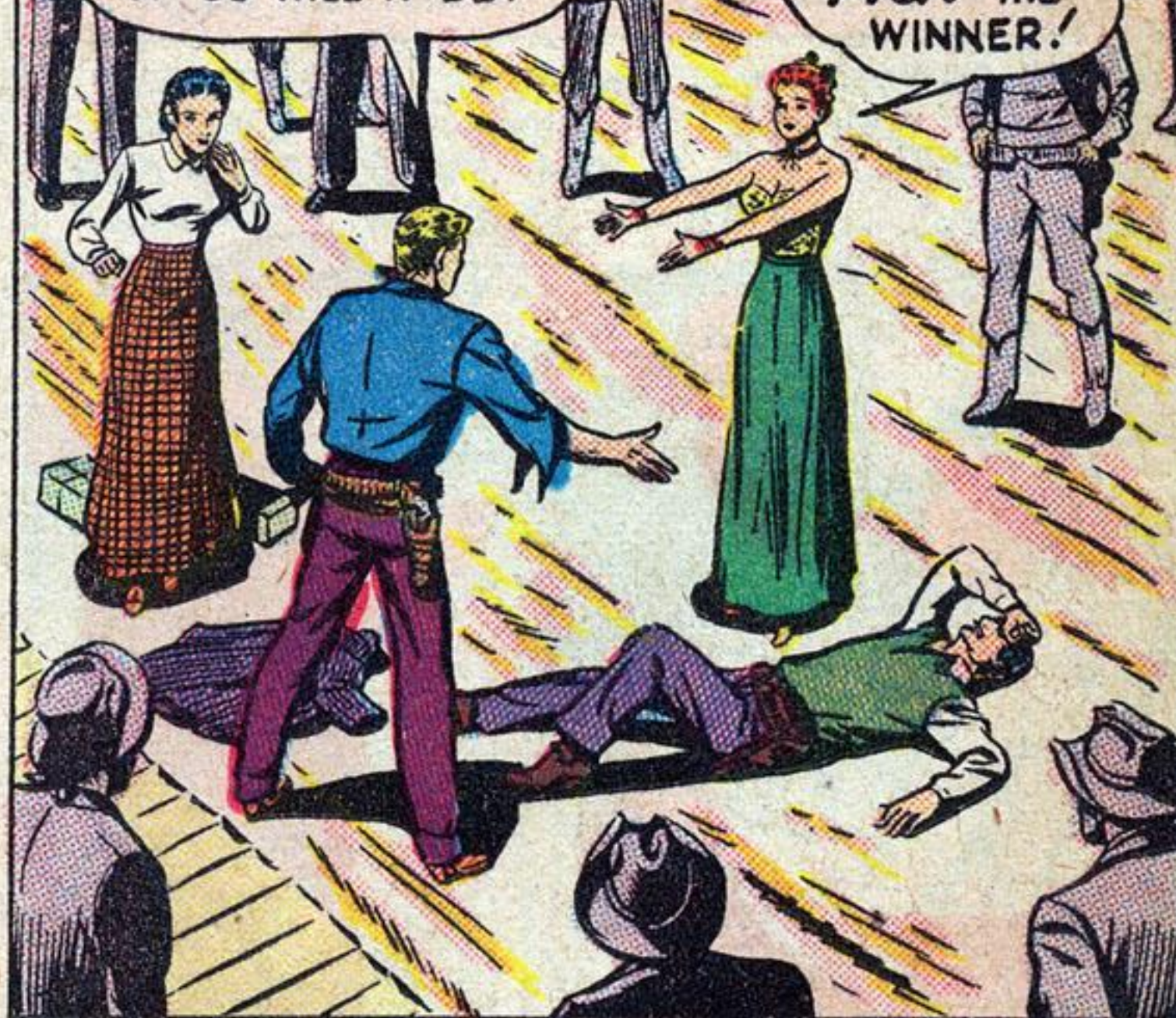
NOW I'M GOIN' TO KNOCK YOU COLD... COLD AT HER FEET! LET HER CHOOSE WHICH IS THE BETTER MAN!

UGH!

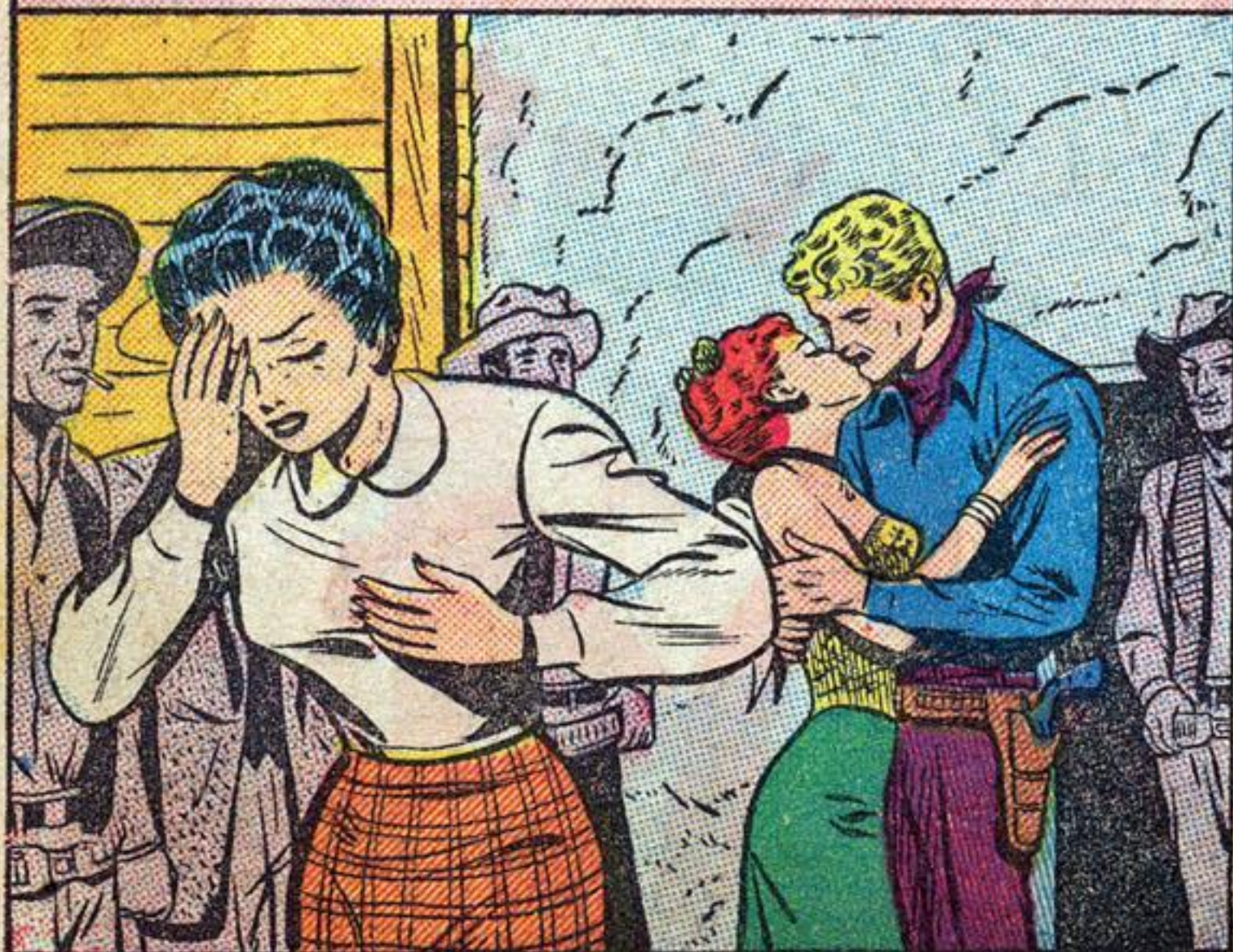


THERE ... THERE HE IS! TAKE YOUR PICK, REDHEAD -- WHICH OF US WILL IT BE?

THAT'S EASY, BIG BOY... I ALWAYS PICK THE WINNER!



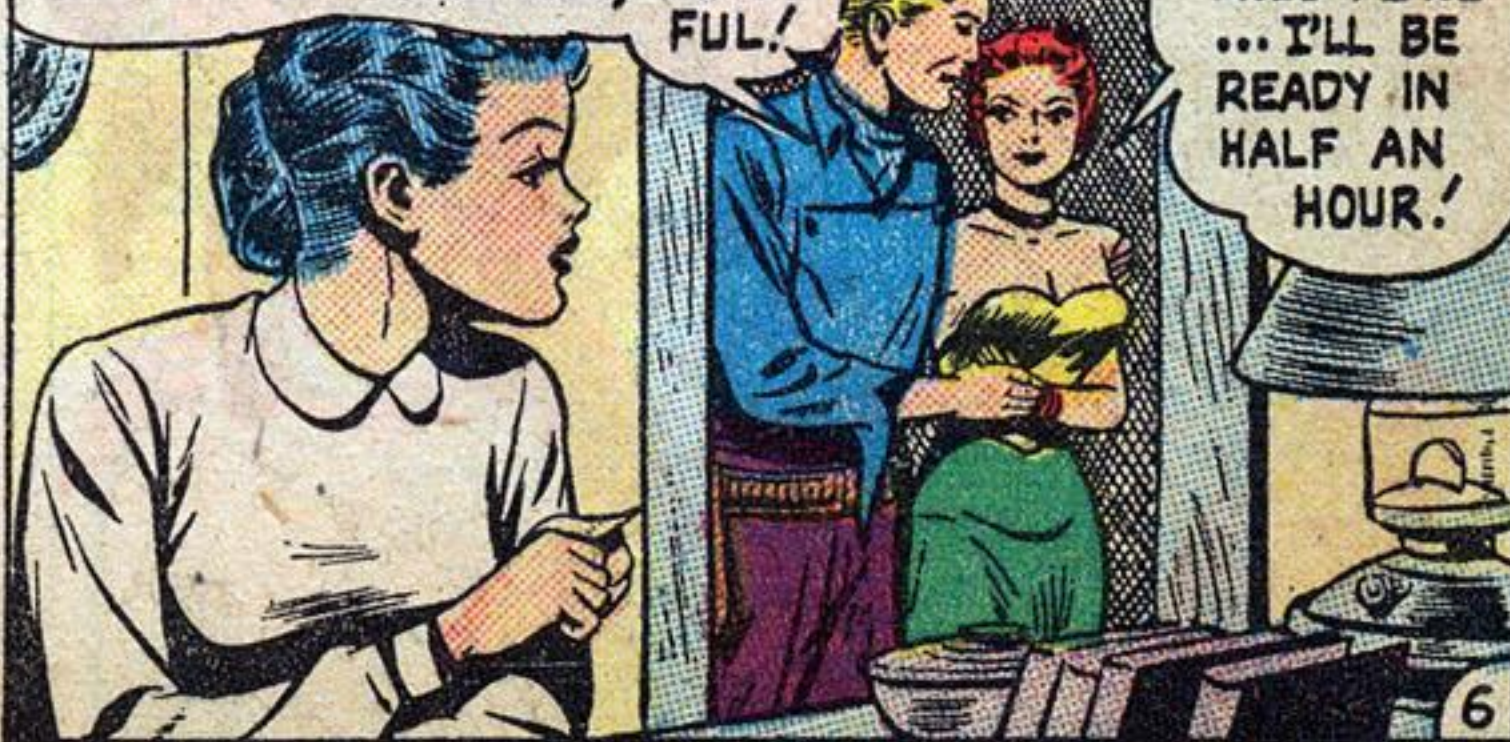
THIS WAS THE CROWNING HUMILIATION OF IT ALL! THERE, IN SIGHT OF THE WHOLE TOWN, HE HAD FOUGHT AND WON HER LIKE A BEAST... THEN, WITH THE BLOOD OF THE BATTLE STILL ON HIS LIPS, HE WENT TO HER AND KISSED HER IN FRONT OF ALL MINERAL WELLS!



I RAN AWAY, BLINDED BY MY TEARS, TO THE ONLY SANCTUARY I KNEW, THE LITTLE SEWING ROOM OFF THE HALL! THERE I SAT, GATHERING THE SHREDS OF MY SELF-RESPECT AND MY LOVE AROUND ME! THEN I HEARD THEM COME IN!

WHAT DO I CARE ABOUT BEIN' SHERIFF OF A ONE-HORSE TOWN LIKE THIS! ALL I WANT IS YOU -- YOU'RE LIKE A FIRE IN MY BLOOD! GET YOUR THINGS TOGETHER ... I'LL GET THE HORSES READY AN' WE'LL SHAKE THE DUST OF THIS PLACE! YOU AN' ME CAN DO BIG THINGS TOGETHER, BEAUTIFUL!

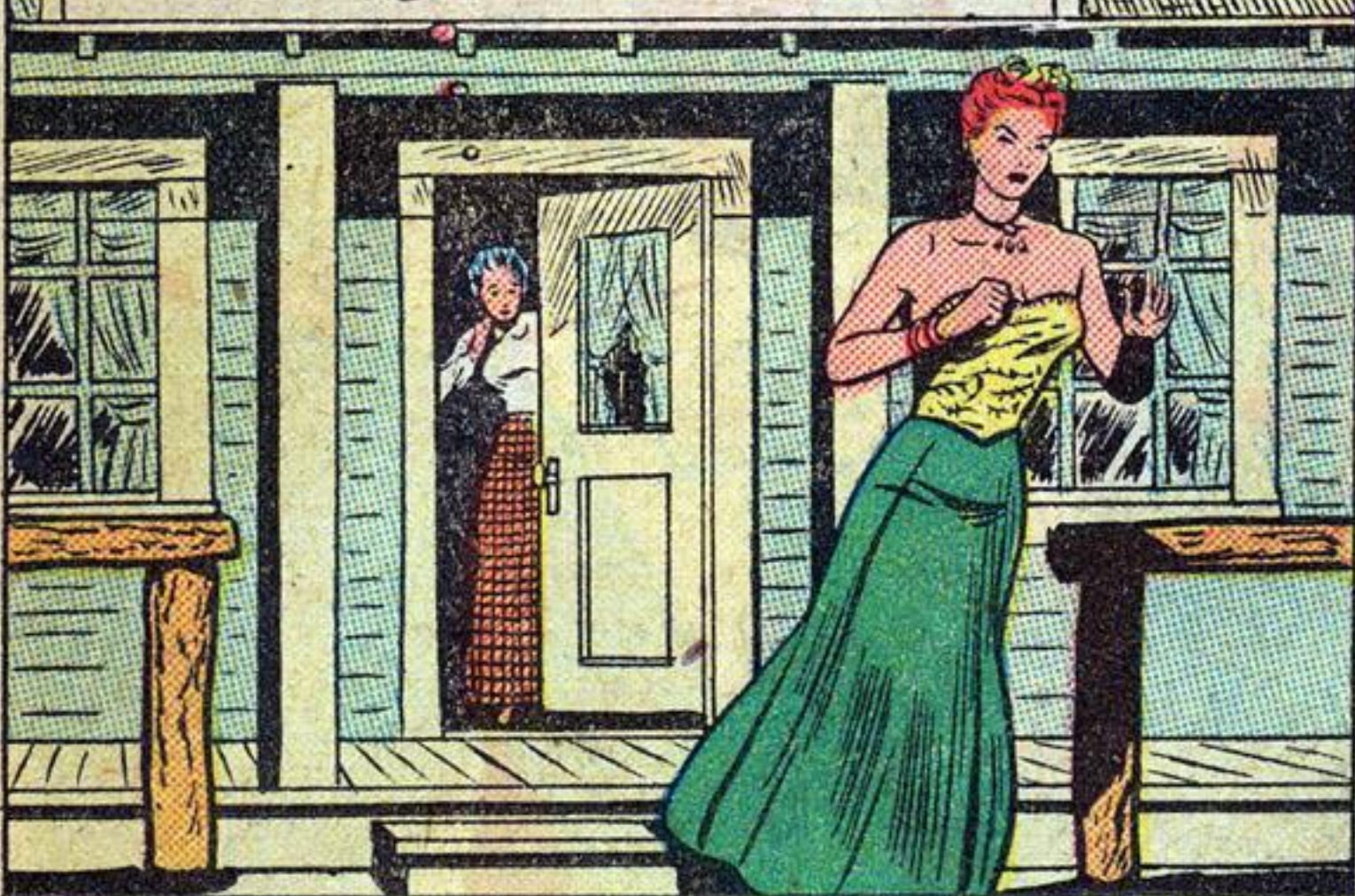
OKAY, BIG BOY! I'LL PACK! THERE'S SOMETHIN' I'VE GOT TO GET FROM ACES' PLACE ... I'LL BE READY IN HALF AN HOUR!



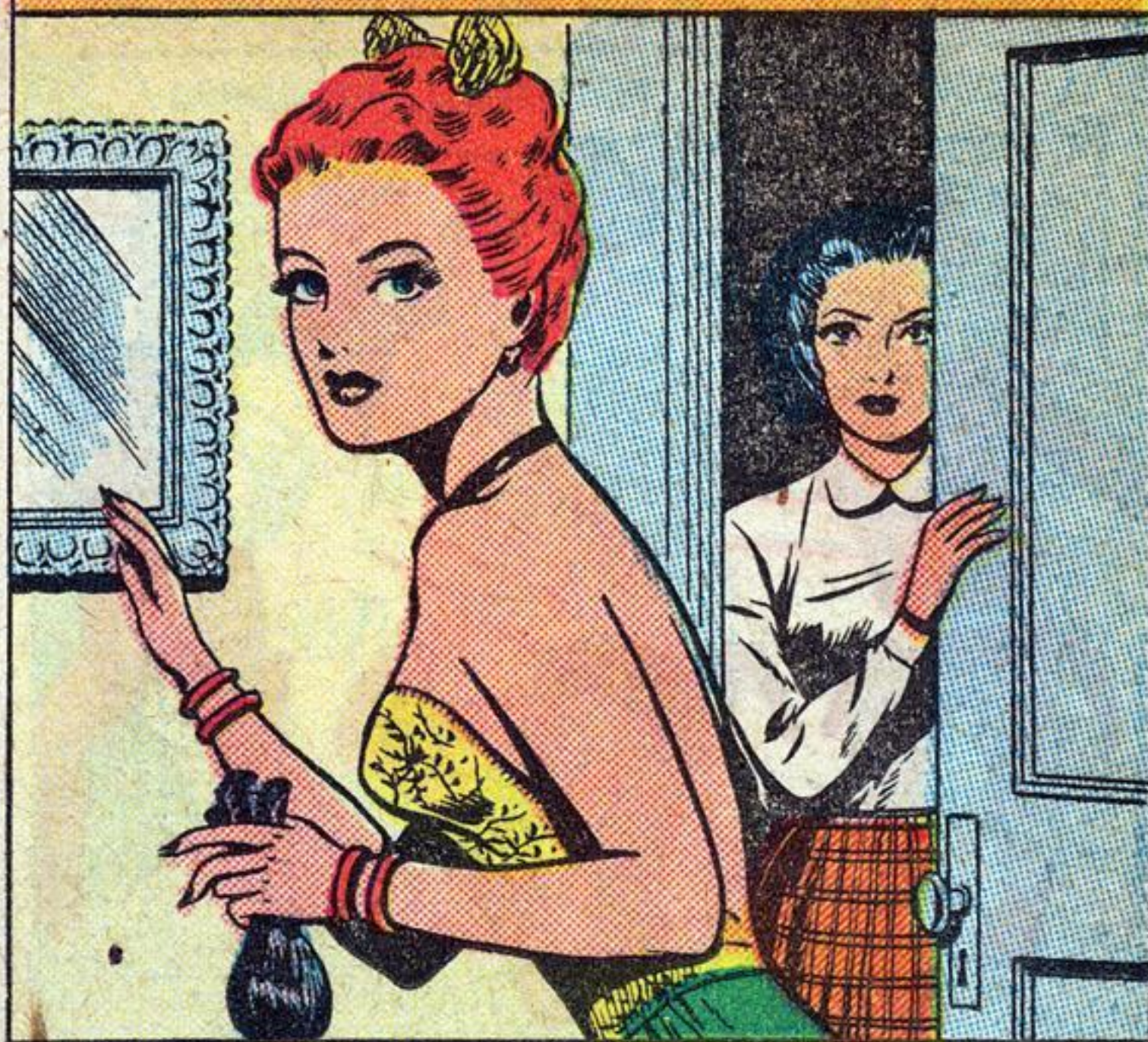
TOM WENT OUT, AND FLO WATCHED HIM UNTIL HE WAS OUT OF SIGHT... THEN SILENTLY SHE SLIPPED THROUGH THE DOOR!

TOM'S SO HONEST, SO UPRIGHT! SHE'LL RUIN HIM... DRAG HIM DOWN TO HER LEVEL! I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING SO THAT TOM SEES THE MISTAKE HE'S MAKING!

WELLS BOARDING HOUSE

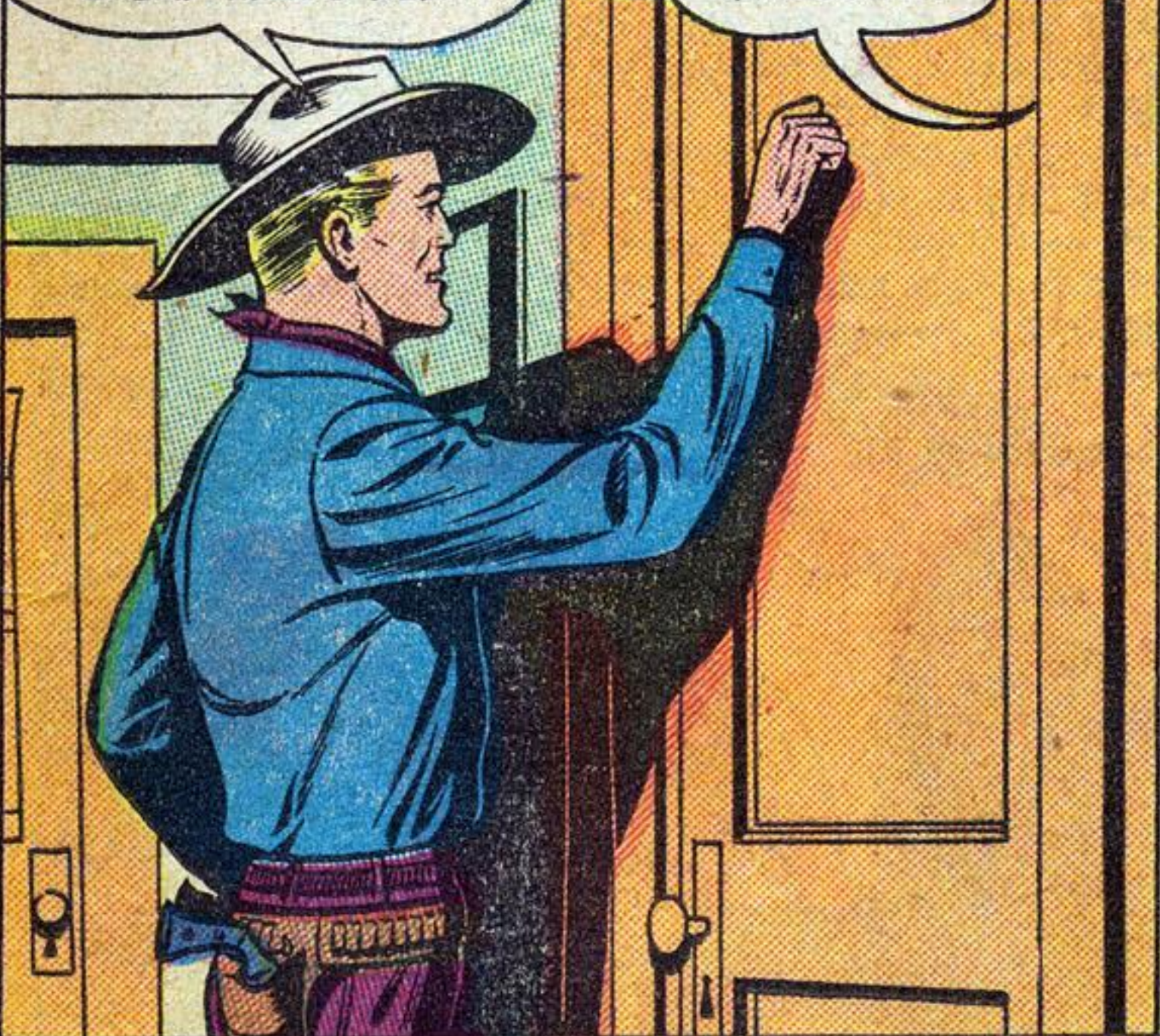


FLO WAS BACK IN TEN MINUTES WITH A SMALL BLACK BAG WHICH SHE CARRIED TO HER ROOM!



FLO, HONEY, COME ON-- EVERYTHING'S READY!

I'LL BE RIGHT THERE, HANDSOME!



I COULDN'T LET THEM GO WITHOUT ONE LAST ATTEMPT TO SAVE HIM FROM HIMSELF... AND FROM HER! I PUT MY PRIDE ASIDE AND STEPPED OUT INTO THE HALL!

DID YOU GET WHAT YOU WANTED AT ACES', RED?

I SURE DID, HONEY... IT'S RIGHT HERE IN THIS LITTLE BLACK BAG! LET'S GET GOING FAST-- I DON'T THINK ACES IS GOING TO LIKE MY TAKING THIS LITTLE TOKEN!

WAIT! TOM, DON'T DO THIS... I'M NOT ASKING FOR MY OWN SAKE... THINK OF YOURSELF... YOUR HONOR! PLEASE, TOM... PLEASE!



DON'T WORRY, LADY, HE AIN'T GOIN' ANY PLACE... AN' NEITHER ARE YOU, YOU DOUBLE-CROSSIN' RED-HEADED VIXEN!

ACES! WAIT... I CAN EXPLAIN... IT WAS ALL A GAG!



A GAG, HUH? WELL, IT AIN'T FUNNY WHEN YOU TRY A RUN-OUT WITH THE WELLS FARGO LOOT... LUCKY I SAW YOU SNEAK IN AN' LIFT IT FROM MY SAFE! ME AN' THE BOYS DON'T GO FOR DOUBLE-CROSS GAGS LIKE THAT, SEE! I GOT A BULLET WITH YOUR NAME ON IT, SWEETHEART-- THAT'LL LEAVE AN EXTRA SHARE FOR ME AN' THE BOYS!

THAT'S ALL I WANTED TO HEAR! ...LOOK OUT, JENNIE!



I HEARD TOM CALL MY NAME, BUT I COULDN'T MOVE! THEN THE HALLS WERE FULL OF THE ACRID BITE OF CORDITE AND THE BLOOD CALL OF BOOMING GUNS!

LOOK OUT, ACES... THE SHER... ARGGGHHH!



YOU... OHHH!

I WANT YOU ALIVE, ACES!

IT WAS ALL OVER IN A MINUTE... THEN THE HALL WAS FILLED WITH TOWNSPEOPLE BROUGHT BY THE SOUND AND FURY OF THE BATTLE!

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE, TOM -- QUICK!

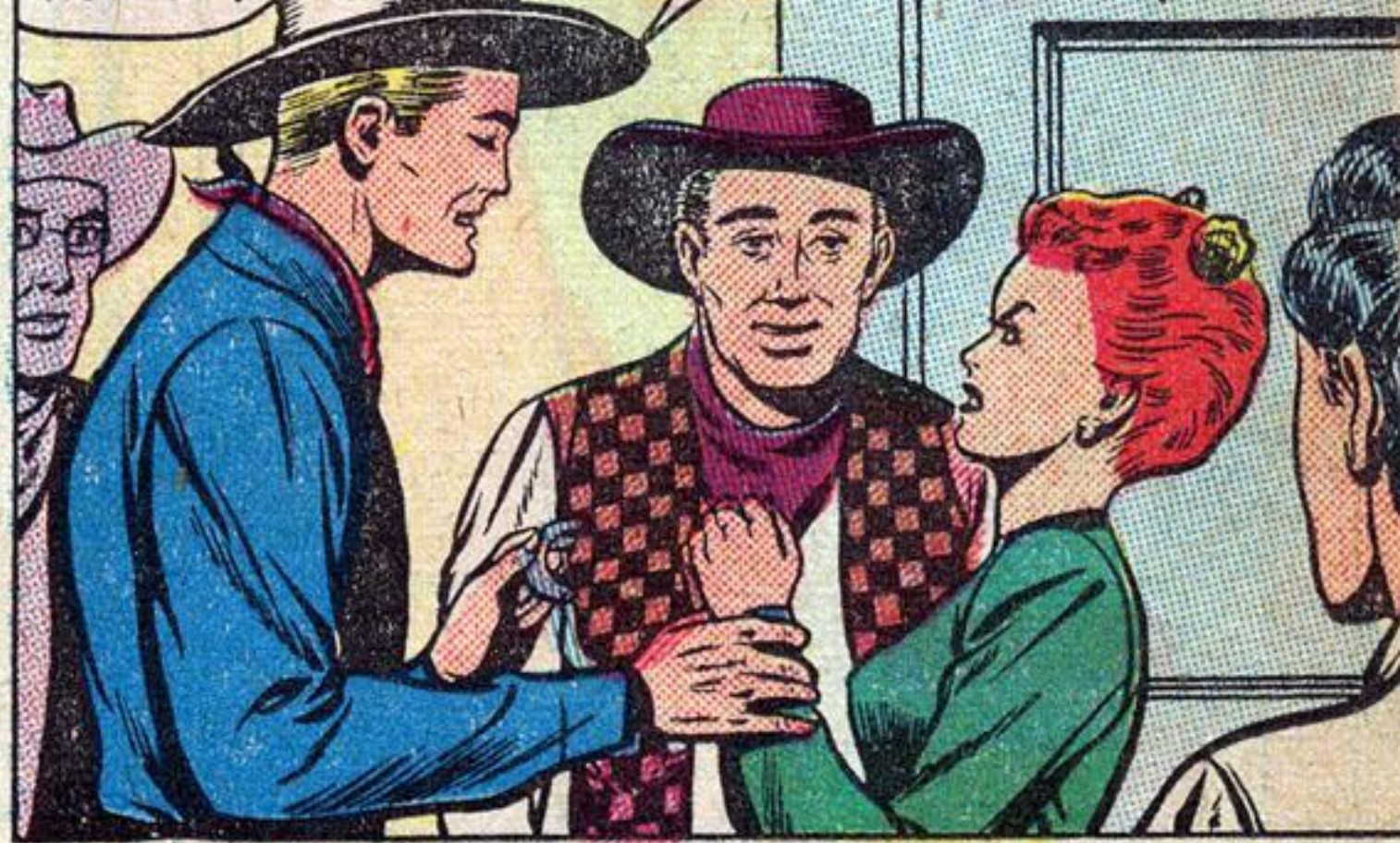
THERE'S NO HURRY, FLO... BUT YOU'LL BE OUT OF HERE QUICKER THAN YOU THINK!



... AND ON YOUR WAY TO JAIL! MY DEPUTY WILL ESCORT YOU AND YOUR PARTNER, ACES, WHILE I EXPLAIN A FEW THINGS TO THESE GOOD PEOPLE... AND TO THE GIRL I'M GOING TO MARRY! TAKE THE BLACK BAG, TOO, JIM -- IT CONTAINS THE WELLS FARGO GOLD FROM THE STAGE HOLDUP!

IT'LL BE A PLEASURE, TOM!

YOU TWO-TIMIN', NO-GOOD BADGE TOTER!

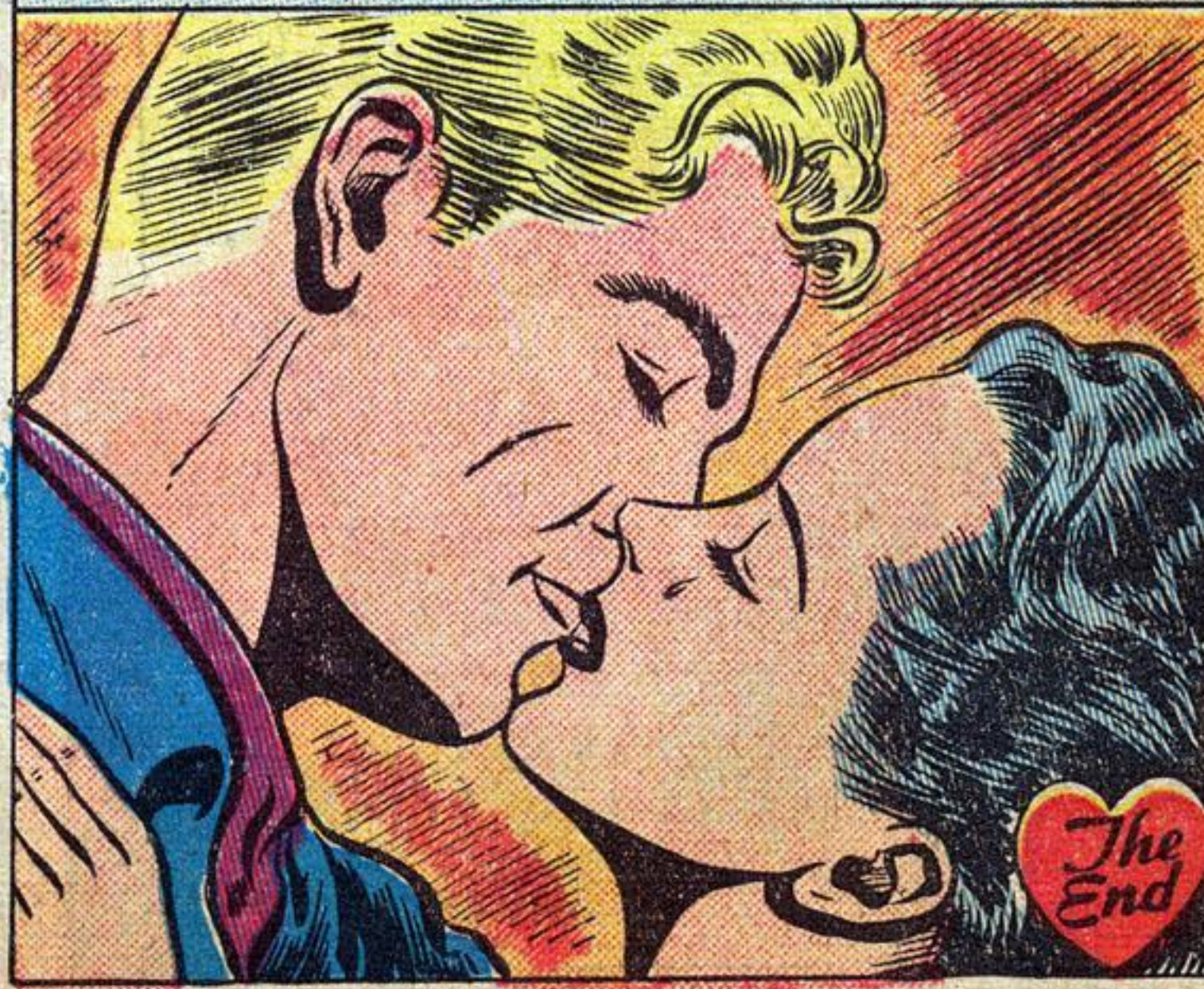


TOM'S DEPUTY LED FLO AND ACES AWAY, THE REDHEAD SCREAMING AT TOM LIKE A WILD CAT! THEN HE CAME TO ME AND PUT HIS ARM AROUND ME AND FACED THE PEOPLE.

I SAW THIS RED-HEADED GAL WORKIN' FOR WELLS FARGO IN CARSON CITY LAST TIME I WAS THERE... THE TIME I SAW THE DRESS I WANTED JENNIE TO BUY! WHEN I SAW HER GET OFF THE STAGE AND HEARD OF THE HOLD-UP SO CLOSE TO TOWN, I KNEW IT HAD TO BE AN INSIDE JOB AN' DONE BY SOMEONE IN MINERAL WELLS! SO I MADE MY PLAY FOR THE GAL, FIGGERIN' IT WOULD SET OFF THE FIREWORKS AN' BLOW THINGS INTO THE OPEN! IT DID -- AN' YOU ALL SAW THE WINDUP! AS FOR JENNIE...



HE TOOK ME INTO HIS ARMS, BUT I COULDN'T SEE TOO WELL THROUGH THE TEARS OF HAPPINESS... HAPPINESS, BECAUSE TOM HADN'T CHANGED! HE WAS MINE... HAD BEEN MINE... WOULD ALWAYS BE MINE UNTIL THE END OF TIME!



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and Curley were to sweep toward the East covering the country on that side of the pasture and driving all the cattle back toward the corral. Dad went with Joe to the west and I was to ride back through the center. I dismounted, as I had to wait until the drivers got into line before starting my drive back.

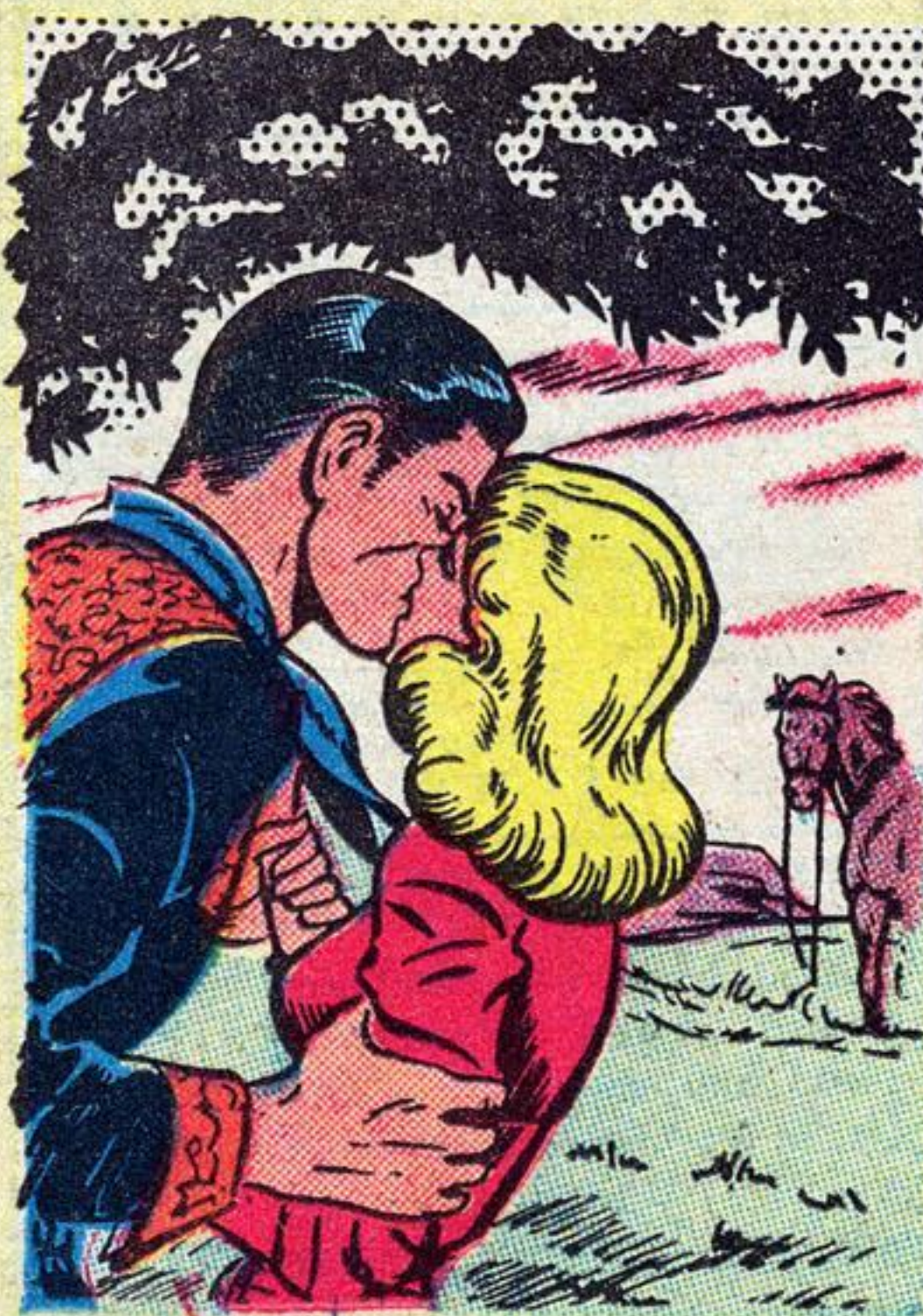
As I watched Joe and Dad disappear over the ridge, I swung onto the saddle and started to hunt for cattle. I found several small bunches, fairly gentle and had them lined out toward the corral before I topped the ridge to the east to make sure that I wasn't ahead of the drive.

Suddenly, I spotted Joe coming toward me with his horse at a dead run. A wild cow that had a good start on him was heading back up country, flying over the ground with the speed of a frightened deer. I kicked Soapy wide open. I knew that I could head off that cow. I started to gain on him, when I realized that Soapy's nose was reaching farther and farther ahead of her, and that she was in a dead run sailing toward the bottom of the wash at a terrifying rate of speed—the tie had come loose! I pulled the reins up with all my strength, but it was no use. I remembered with a strangling fear that in the next draw beyond lay a treacherous sandy wash. If Soapy hit it going this fast, nothing short of a miracle would keep her on her feet.

The cow had escaped. I looked back and saw that Joe had changed his course and was trying to reach me, whipping his horse unmercifully. He was gaining, but he'd never make it in time. He yelled at me and I looked back. He was waving his lasso in the air.

"Jackie! Catch it and secure it to your saddle horn, then grab the horses neck!" he screamed, as he flung the lasso at me.

I caught it, expecting to be jerked completely off the horse, but he'd left it slack. I tied it to the horn and leaned forward putting my arms around Soapy's neck. Suddenly I realized what he was trying to do and I clenched my teeth with fear. He was going to try to stop Soapy by pulling on the lasso, and I had to keep the saddle on by holding onto her neck. If Joe jerked the rope too hard we'd both be thrown over backwards.



I held my breath, the rope came taut, and there was a hard jerk. I grasped the reins, she reared up, the rope slacked and she regained her balance. I headed her off to the right. Joe had dismounted and had the rope at an angle around a tree to give himself leverage. He started to pull harder and harder. Soapy tried to pull back to the left, he jerked hard, and the saddle twisted way over to the right. I clutched the horse's sweat-drenched neck with all my might, feeling the saddle turn under me with another yank of

the rope. Then Soapy stopped dead and I dismounted, pale and shaking. Joe lashed the rope to a tree, and as he ran towards me, everything blacked out.

I woke up in the circle of his arms.

"Oh Joe, I'm so glad you're here!" I murmured. His face came down to meet mine and he kissed me long and tenderly. When I opened my eyes again I saw Dad, Curley and all the boys standing around. I was lying on a quilted couch in a completely strange room.

"Are you all right, Little One?" Dad asked.

"I seem to be," I said a little shakily.

"Joe pulled the neatest trick I ever saw; roping Soapy in so gently—guess we can't call him Greenhorn anymore!" Curley said with a wry grin.

We all talked some more and then Dad and the others filed out, leaving Joe behind. There was a silence as I avoided his eyes.

"Joe, were they here when—?"

"I reckon they were."

I felt the blood rush to my face. "You mean they all saw you kiss me?"

"Well, I guess I just forgot that they were here!" Joe's face broke into a grin. There was another silence.

"Joe, this house . . . is this the old Norton house near the wash? It looks so different."

"That's what I wanted to tell you about last night, Jackie. I bought it and fixed it up. I kind of wondered if you'd consider moving over!" In a flash I was in his arms, giving him my answer, for Joe wasn't an Easterner any more—he was all Western, and all mine!

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One day, the two boys quarrelled over the location of a site for their proposed city of Rome. Romulus set up the boundaries on the site where he and his brother were cast ashore years before. Remus did not like the location and made fun of the boundary wall set up by Romulus and leaped over it. In heated anger, Romulus struck and slew his brother and immediately regretted it.

Some time later after the city of Rome was started, Romulus was holding a review of his army when suddenly the skies grew dark and a storm fell upon them. The people fled in terror. When the storm was over and the people returned, Romulus was not to be found. The belief of the people was that during the darkness, thunder and lightning of the storm, Romulus' father Mars, carried him off to the dwelling place of the gods.

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WHEN HE ENTERED MY LIFE, I KNEW THAT, FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, MY LIFE WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN... FOR THIS GRIM-LIPPED, BITTER, HARD-AS-NAILS STRANGER HAD STOLEN MY HEART!

6916



THE FIRST TIME I HEARD DALE MORGAN'S NAME MENTIONED WAS BY DAD... HE TOLD ME THE NEWS ALMOST CASUALLY/ BUT IF HE COULD HAVE KNOWN THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ANNOUNCEMENT THERE WOULD'VE BEEN MORE EXCITEMENT IN HIS VOICE...

OH, MARTHA, YOU'LL HAVE TO GO INTO TOWN TO MEET A VISITOR'S TRAIN! HIS NAME'S DALE MORGAN, SON OF ONE OF MY OLDEST FRIENDS! HE'S DUE ON THE 10:20!

I'VE HEARD YOU SPEAK ABOUT DALE... EVER SINCE HE CAME BACK FROM THE ARMY HE'S HAD A BAD CASE OF WAR NERVES! WELL, A COUPLE OF WEEKS HERE AT THE CIRCLE-C OUGHT TO MAKE A NEW MAN OF HIM!



I PULLED UP AT THE STATION JUST AS THE CRACK STREAMLINER SLID IN/ TOMAHAWK, NEVADA, WASN'T EXACTLY A TERMINAL, AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE DAILY TRAIN WAS A BIG EVENT!

HERE SHE COMES/ I WONDER WHAT THIS DALE MORGAN WILL BE LIKE!

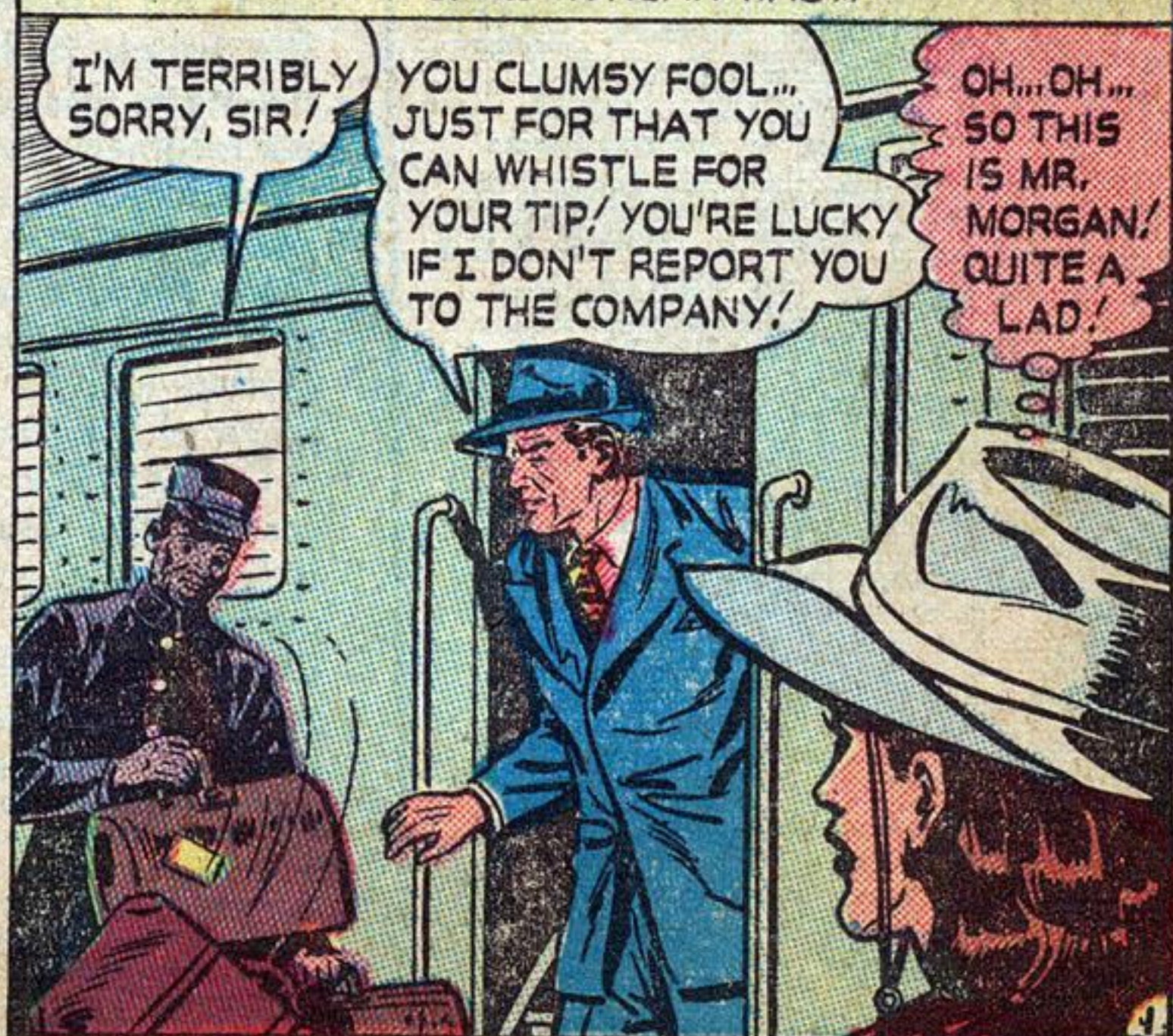


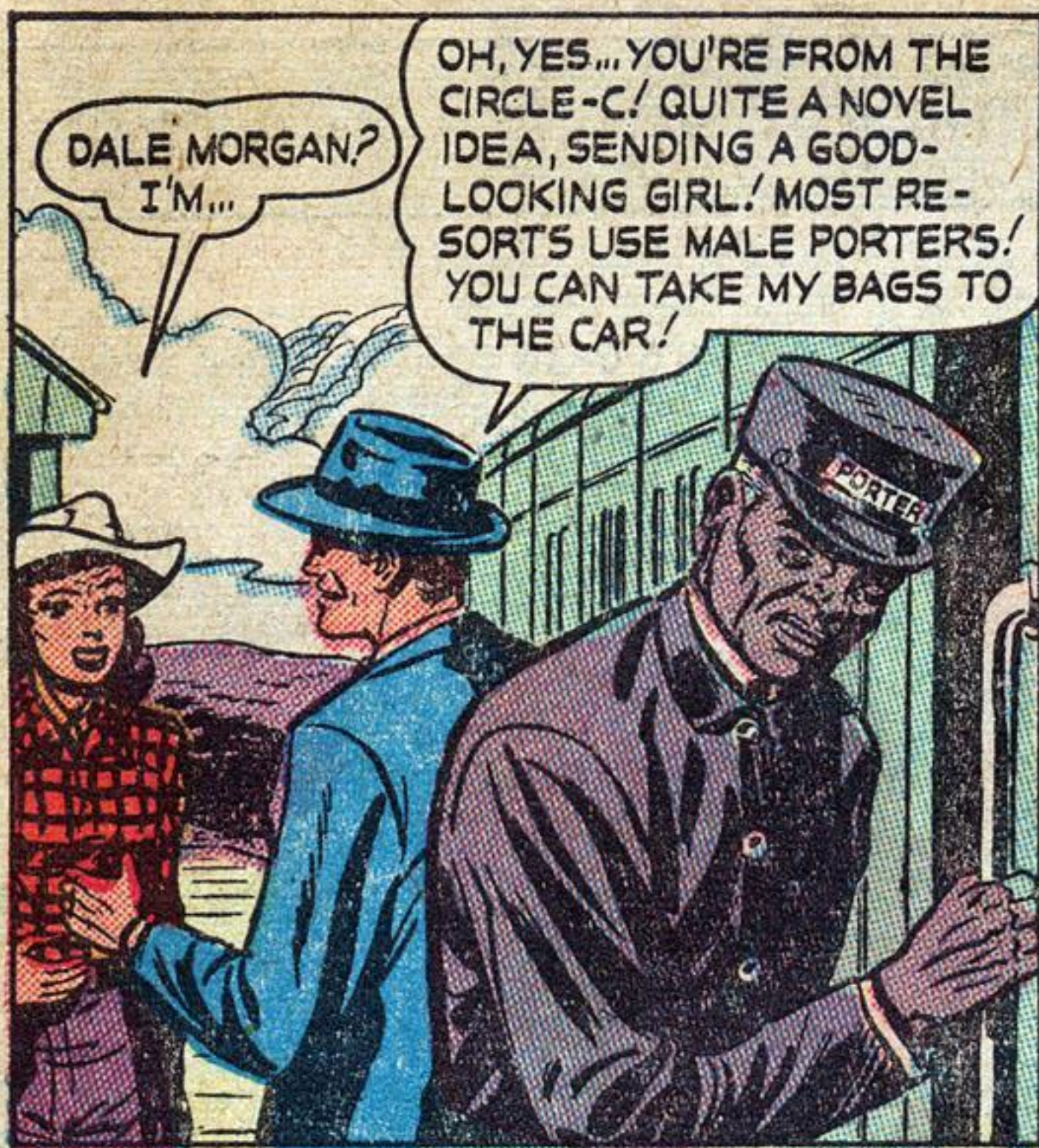
IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO FIND OUT WHAT KIND OF A MAN DALE MORGAN WAS...

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, SIR!

YOU CLUMSY FOOL... JUST FOR THAT YOU CAN WHISTLE FOR YOUR TIP/ YOU'RE LUCKY IF I DON'T REPORT YOU TO THE COMPANY!

OH... OH... SO THIS IS MR. MORGAN/ QUITE A LAD!





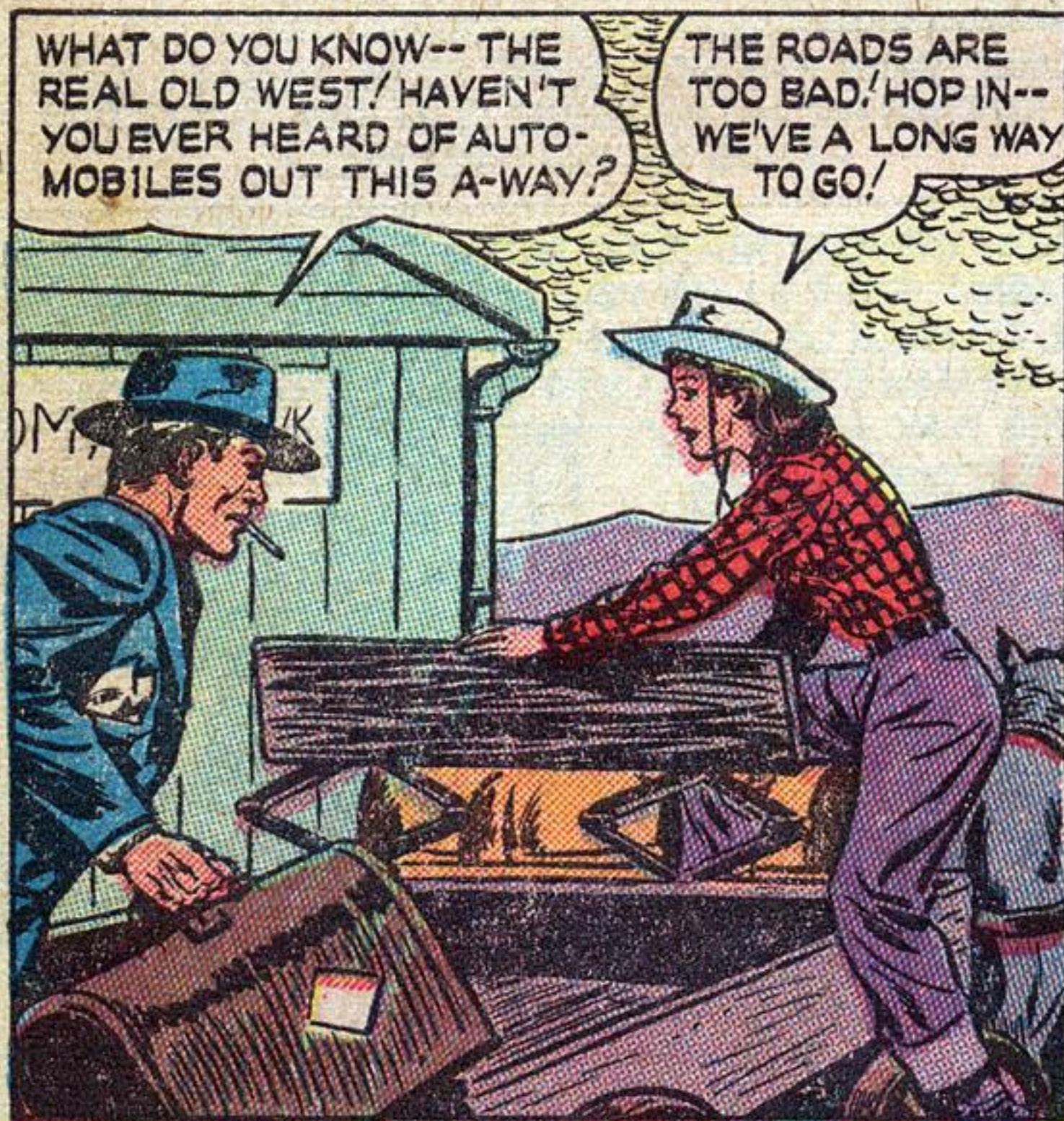
DALE MORGAN?
I'M...

OH, YES... YOU'RE FROM THE
CIRCLE-C! QUITE A NOVEL
IDEA, SENDING A GOOD-
LOOKING GIRL! MOST RE-
SORTS USE MALE PORTERS!
YOU CAN TAKE MY BAGS TO
THE CAR!



LISTEN, MISTER MORGAN, THERE'S
A FEW THINGS YOU'LL HAVE TO GET
STRAIGHT! FIRST, THE CIRCLE-C IS
NOT A RESORT--IT'S A RANCH!
SECOND, I'M NOT A PORTER, BUT
MARTHA CRANE-- MY DAD HAPPENS
TO OWN THE CIRCLE-C! AND THIRD...
OH, WHAT'S THE USE? PICK UP
YOUR BAGS AND LET'S GO!

HUH? MY
BAGS... OH,
YES, OF
COURSE!



WHAT DO YOU KNOW-- THE
REAL OLD WEST! HAVEN'T
YOU EVER HEARD OF AUTO-
MOBILES OUT THIS A-WAY?

THE ROADS ARE
TOO BAD! HOP IN--
WE'VE A LONG WAY
TO GO!



WE DROVE ALONG IN SILENCE! I WAS FURIOUS AT HIS
SUPERIOR, SNOBBISH ATTITUDE... BUT I CONTROLLED
MY ANGER... AFTER ALL, HE WAS OUR GUEST, AND HE
HAD BEEN ILL! THIS, PERHAPS, COULD ACCOUNT FOR
HIS BEHAVIOR!

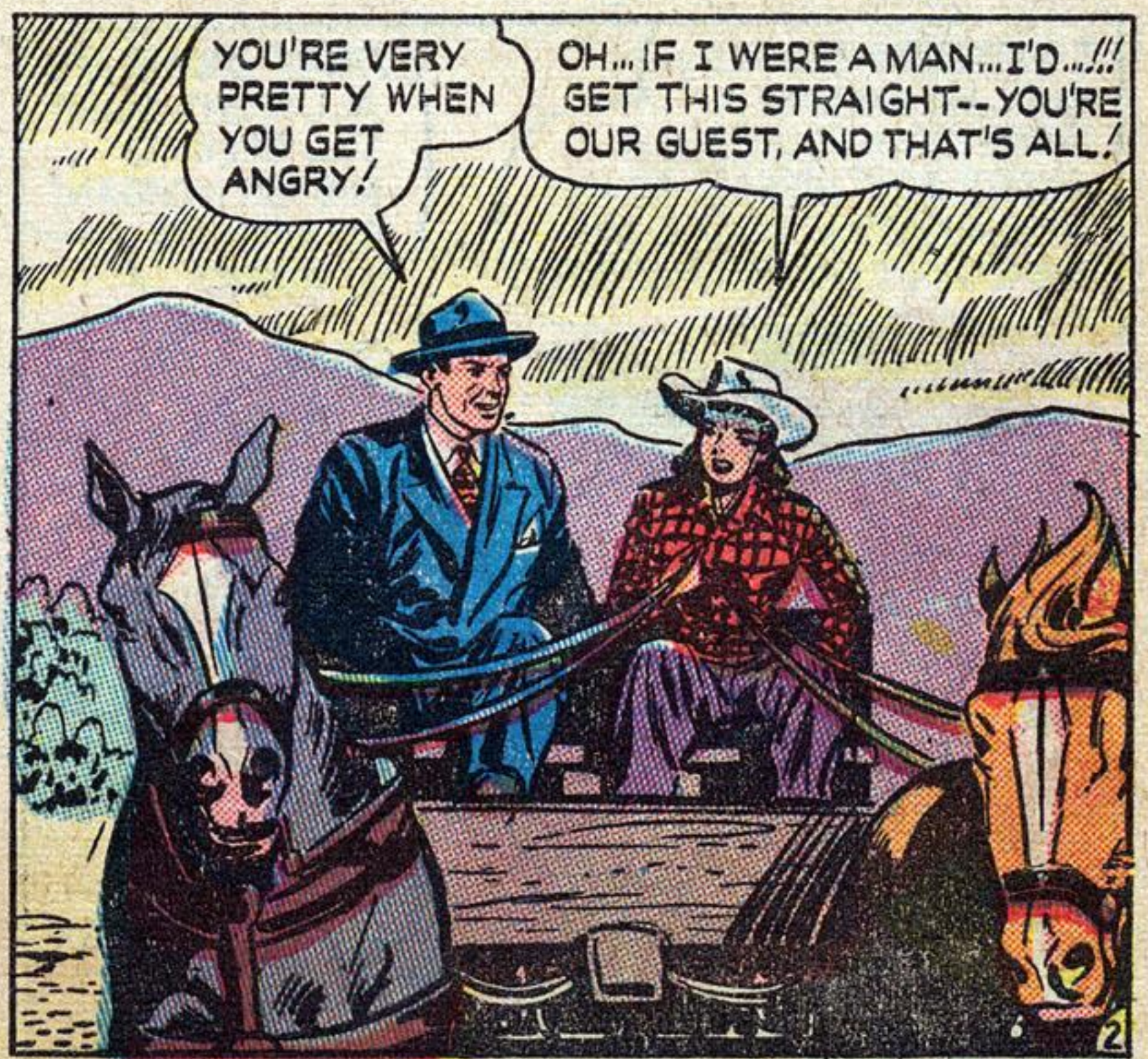
YOU'RE PRETTY CUTE,
MARTHA! I GUESS IT'S
A BIG THRILL FOR YOU
TO HAVE A SMOOTH
OPERATOR LIKE ME
SPENDING TIME WITH
YOU!

GET THIS STRAIGHT, MISTER
MORGAN-- YOU'RE HERE
BECAUSE MY DAD IS DOING
YOUR FATHER A FAVOR!
YOUR PRESENCE MEANS
NOTHING TO ME, ONE
WAY OR THE OTHER!



IT WILL! IT SURE WILL!
MUST BE PRETTY DULL HERE
FOR A GIRL LIKE YOU! HUH...
WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT THAT
I'D MEET A DREAM-BOAT
LIKE YOU IN TOMAHAWK,
NEVADA!

YOU ARE THE
MOST... THE
MOST...



YOU'RE VERY
PRETTY WHEN
YOU GET
ANGRY!

OH... IF I WERE A MAN... I'D...!!!
GET THIS STRAIGHT-- YOU'RE
OUR GUEST, AND THAT'S ALL!

THE TRIP WAS FAR FROM PLEASANT! BY THE TIME WE REACHED THE CIRCLE-C, I VIOLENTLY DISLIKED THIS SMUG EASTERNER! I TRIED HARD NOT TO SHOW DAD HOW I FELT...

HERE HE IS DAD! DALE MORGAN!

HOWDY, SON! WELCOME TO CIRCLE-C! YOU KNOW YOUR FATHER AND I...

YEAH, I KNOW! I HEARD IT A MILLION TIMES! YOU AND POP WERE IN THE ROUGH-RIDERS TOGETHER! YOU TWO WON THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR ALL BY YOURSELVES!



I SAW THE PUZZED HURT IN DAD'S FACE! THIS WAS NOT WHAT HE'D EXPECTED FROM HIS OLDEST FRIEND'S SON...

NOW, JUST A MINUTE, SON... I...

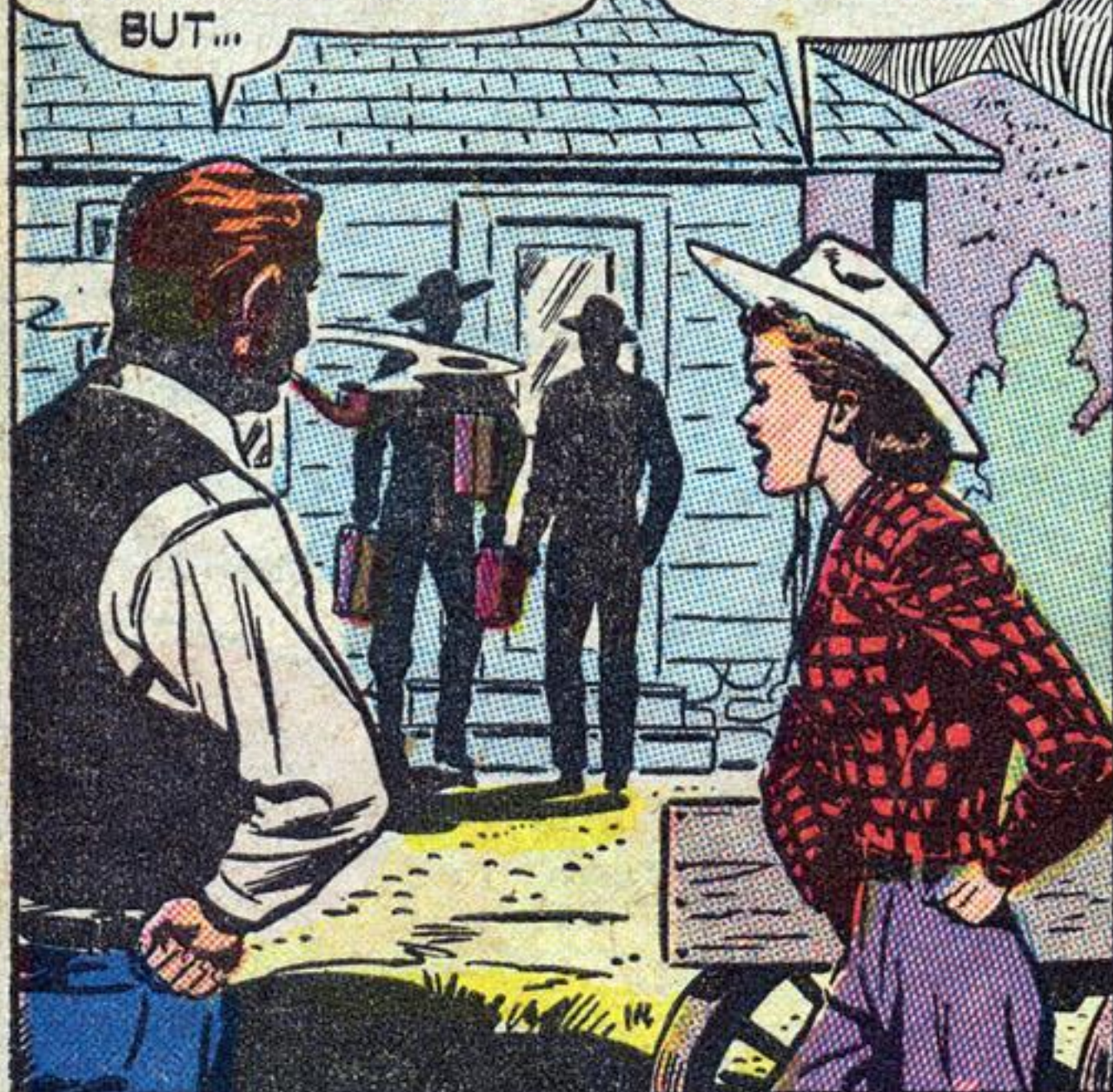
DALE'S TIRED, DAD! SLIM, TAKE MISTER MORGAN'S BAGS TO HIS ROOM! HE'LL STAY IN THE MAIN HOUSE!

SURE, MISS MARTHA!



MIGHTY PECULIAR LAD, ISN'T HE, MARTHA? KIND OF NICE-LOOKIN'... BUT...

REMEMBER, DAD, HE'S BEEN SICK... MIGHTY SICK!



OBVIOUSLY, DALE WAS NOT GOING TO BE AN EASY GUEST, FOR IN NO TIME HE ANTAGONIZED SLIM, ONE OF THE TOP HANDS ON THE CIRCLE-C...

WHY, THAT ORNERY NO-GOOD DUDE! IF IT WASN'T THAT I LIKE YOU, MISTER CRANE, I'D PACK UP AND RIDE OUT OF HERE! NO MAN'S EVER TALKED TO ME THIS WAY AFORE!

SLIM... WHAT HAPPENED?



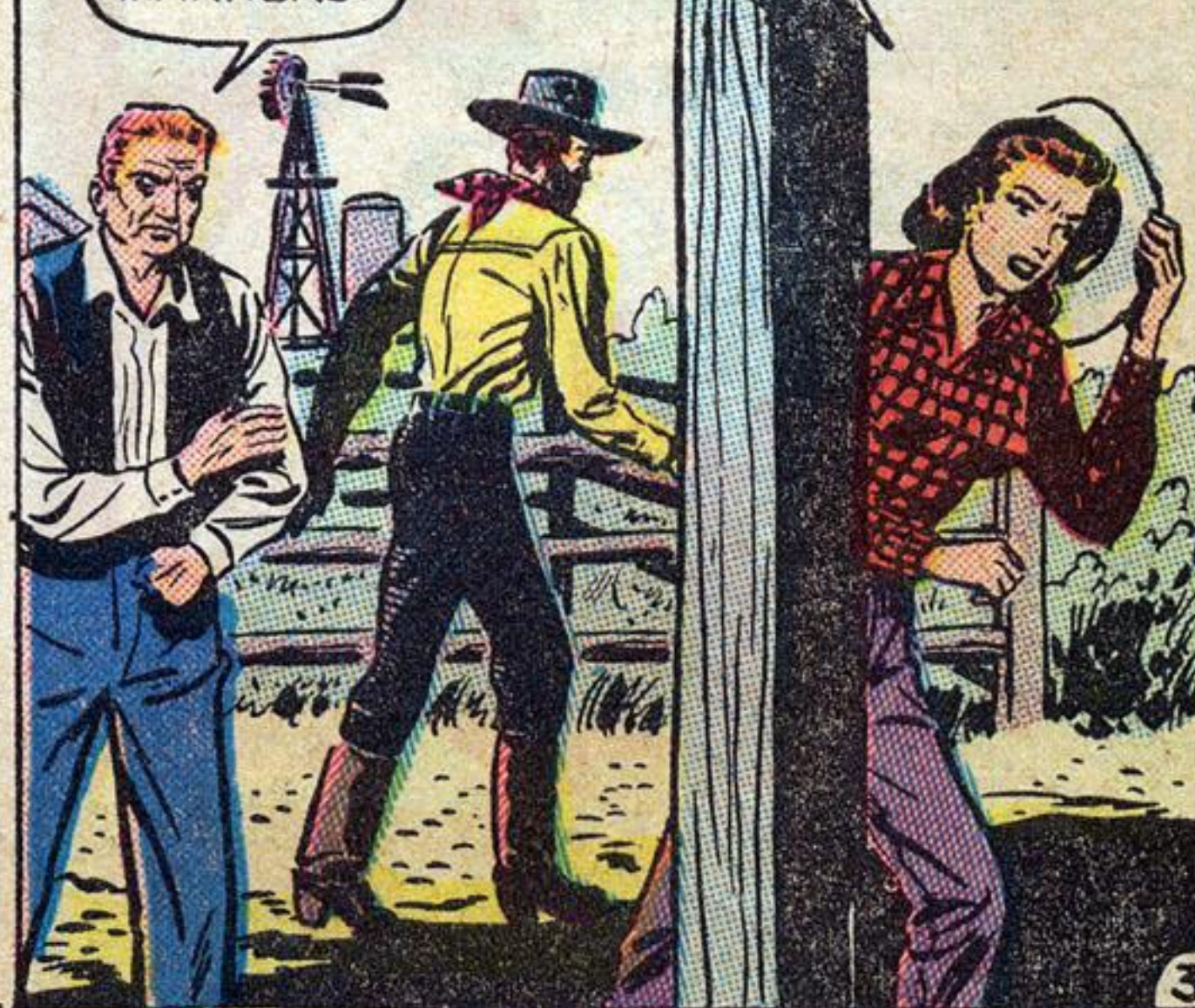
I CARRIED HIS BAGS... AND... HE GAVE ME A DIME! "BUY YOURSELF A SMOKE, BOY," HE SAID TO ME! MISS MARTHA, I'M A COW-HAND... NOT AN ERRAND BOY!

THAT DOES IT! ALL RIGHT, SLIM-- I'LL TALK TO MISTER MORGAN! GO BACK TO WORK!



WHY, THE YOUNG WHELP! IF I WAS HIS AGE... I'D... LEARN HIM SOME MANNERS!

LEAVE IT TO ME, DAD! I'LL TAKE HIM DOWN A COUPLE OF PEGS!



WHEN I REACHED HIS ROOM, THE DOOR WAS OPEN... AND WHEN I STEPPED INSIDE... ALL THE ANGER IN ME MELTED, FOR SUDDENLY, I UNDERSTOOD HIM...



LISTEN TO ME, DALE... I...

OHhh! OHhh! MY HEAD... MY HEAD...

IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO? I MEAN...



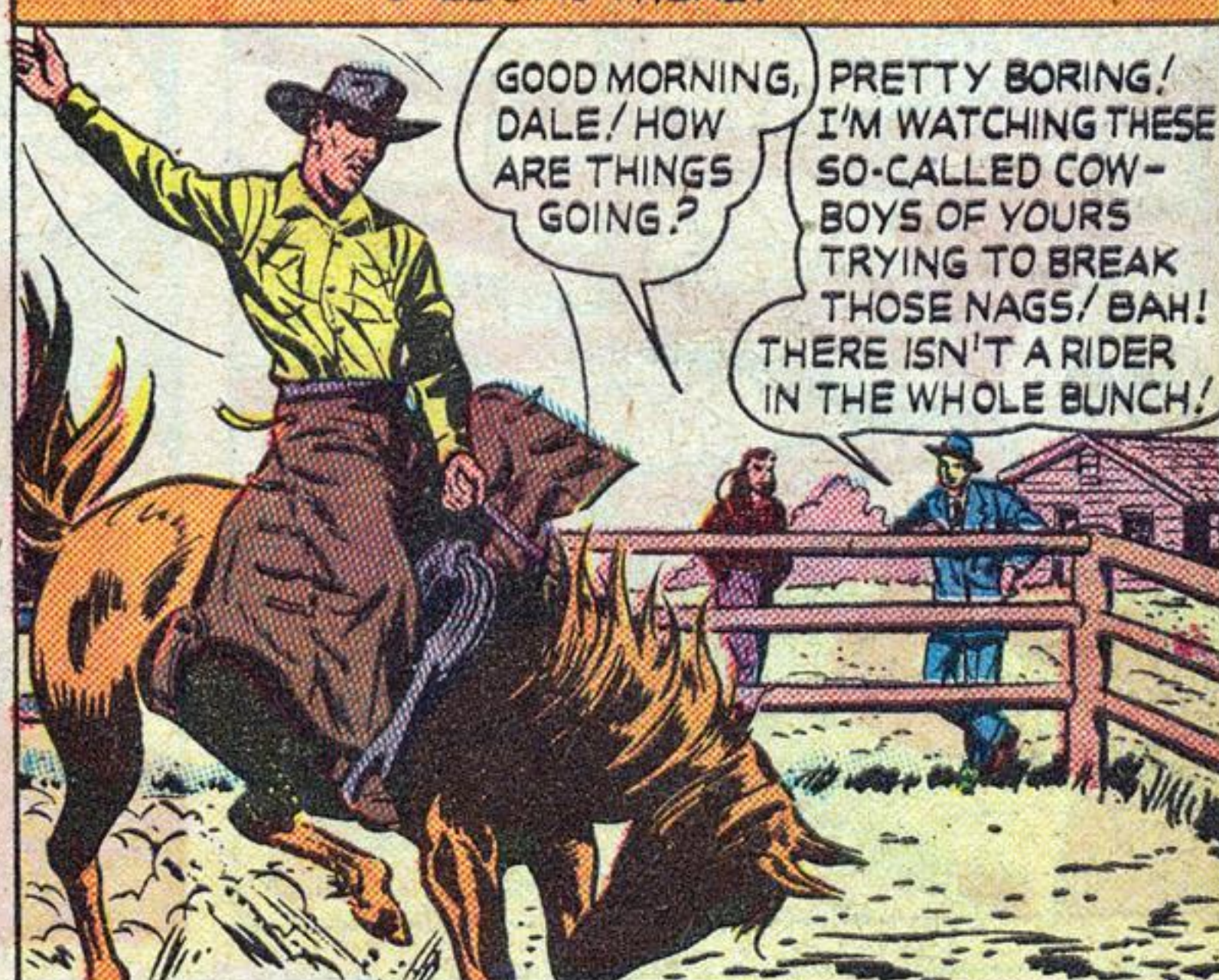
I'LL BE ALL RIGHT! I GET THIS WAY... OHh, THE PAIN! YOU SEE... I HAD A HEAD WOUND... AND SOMETIMES... WELL, I GET OUT OF HAND! NOW YOU KNOW! I SUPPOSE YOU'LL PITY ME, TOO!

NO! I'LL NOT PITY YOU! YOU DON'T NEED PITY! IT'S YOUR PROBLEM, AND YOU'LL HAVE TO WORK IT OUT, YOURSELF! I'M SORRY THAT YOU WERE HURT-- THAT'S ALL I CAN SAY! MAYBE OUT HERE ON THE RANCH, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TAKE HOLD OF YOURSELF!



YEAH... MAYBE... I... HOPE SO!

LIFE ON A RANCH LIKE THE CIRCLE-C WAS AN ACTIVE ONE! IT WAS BRANDING TIME, AND I WAS TOO BUSY TO PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO DALE FOR THE NEXT WEEK! BUT ONE MORNING THE BOYS WERE BREAKING A NEW BATCH OF BRONCS... AND I WALKED TO THE CORRAL! DALE WAS THERE!



GOOD MORNING, DALE! HOW ARE THINGS GOING?

PRETTY BORING! I'M WATCHING THESE SO-CALLED COW-BOYS OF YOURS TRYING TO BREAK THOSE NAGS! BAH! THERE ISN'T A RIDER IN THE WHOLE BUNCH!

I HEARD WHAT YOU SAID, MISTER... AND I DON'T LIKE IT NONE!

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT, COWBOY? IT'S MY OPINION! I HAVE A RIGHT TO THINK WHAT I PLEASE!

SLIM!



YEP! BUT KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT! THINK WHAT YOU WANT-- DON'T SAY IT! WE DON'T LIKE TIN HORNS IN THESE PARTS!

YOU KNOW SOMETHING, COWBOY? I'D GET READY TO BACK THOSE WORDS WITH A LITTLE ACTION!



I WAS GOING TO STEP BETWEEN THEM... BUT THEN... I THOUGHT, PERHAPS THIS WAS WHAT HE NEEDED! IF DALE COULD RELEASE HIS VENOM IN ONE WILD BURST OF FURY... THEN, HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO RELAX... TO CONTROL HIS BURNING RESENTMENT AGAINST EVERYONE!

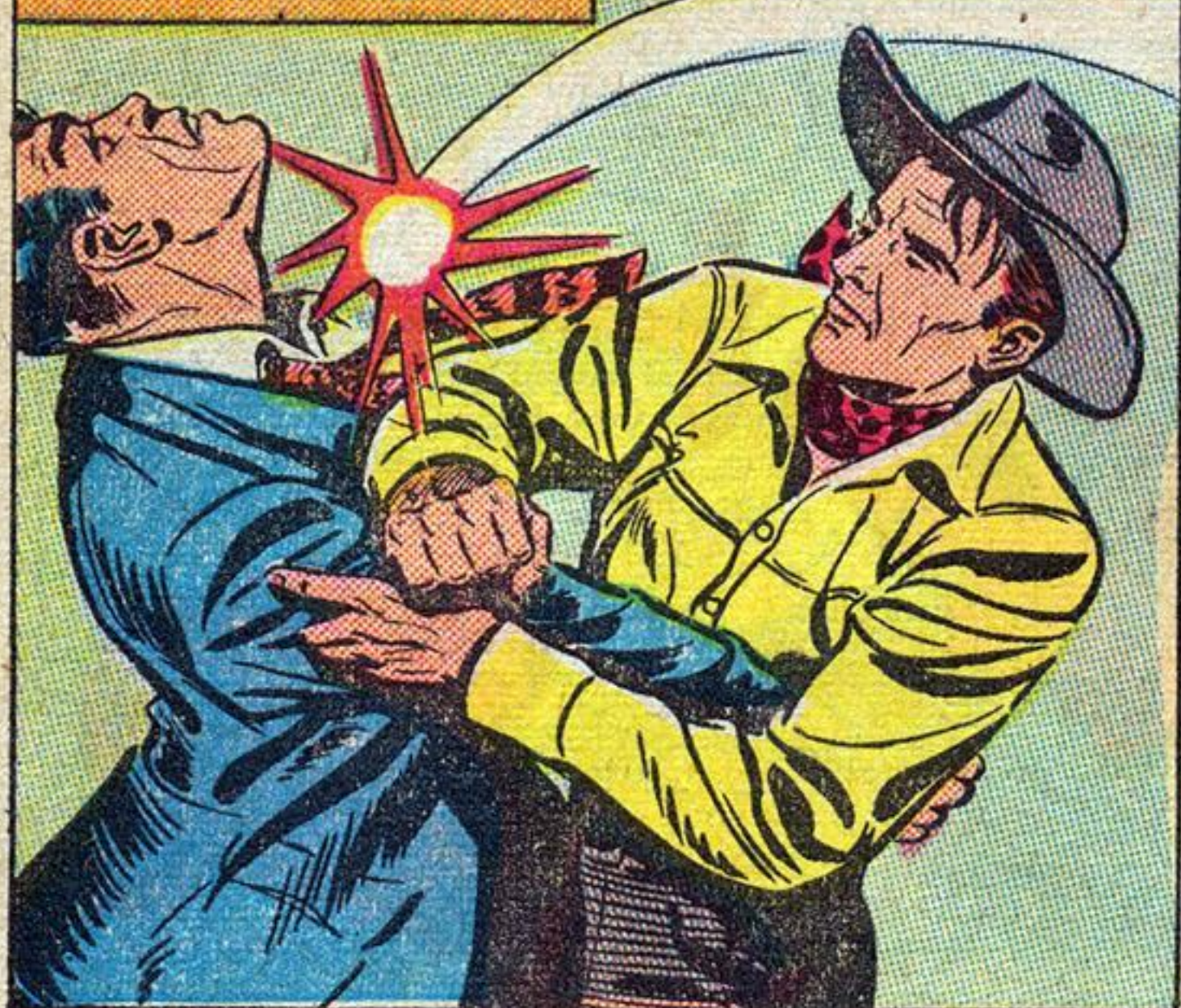
SLIM! DON'T HURT HIM! REMEMBER, HE'S DAD'S GUEST!

I WON'T MESS HIM UP, MISS MARTHA-- JUST STEP ASIDE!

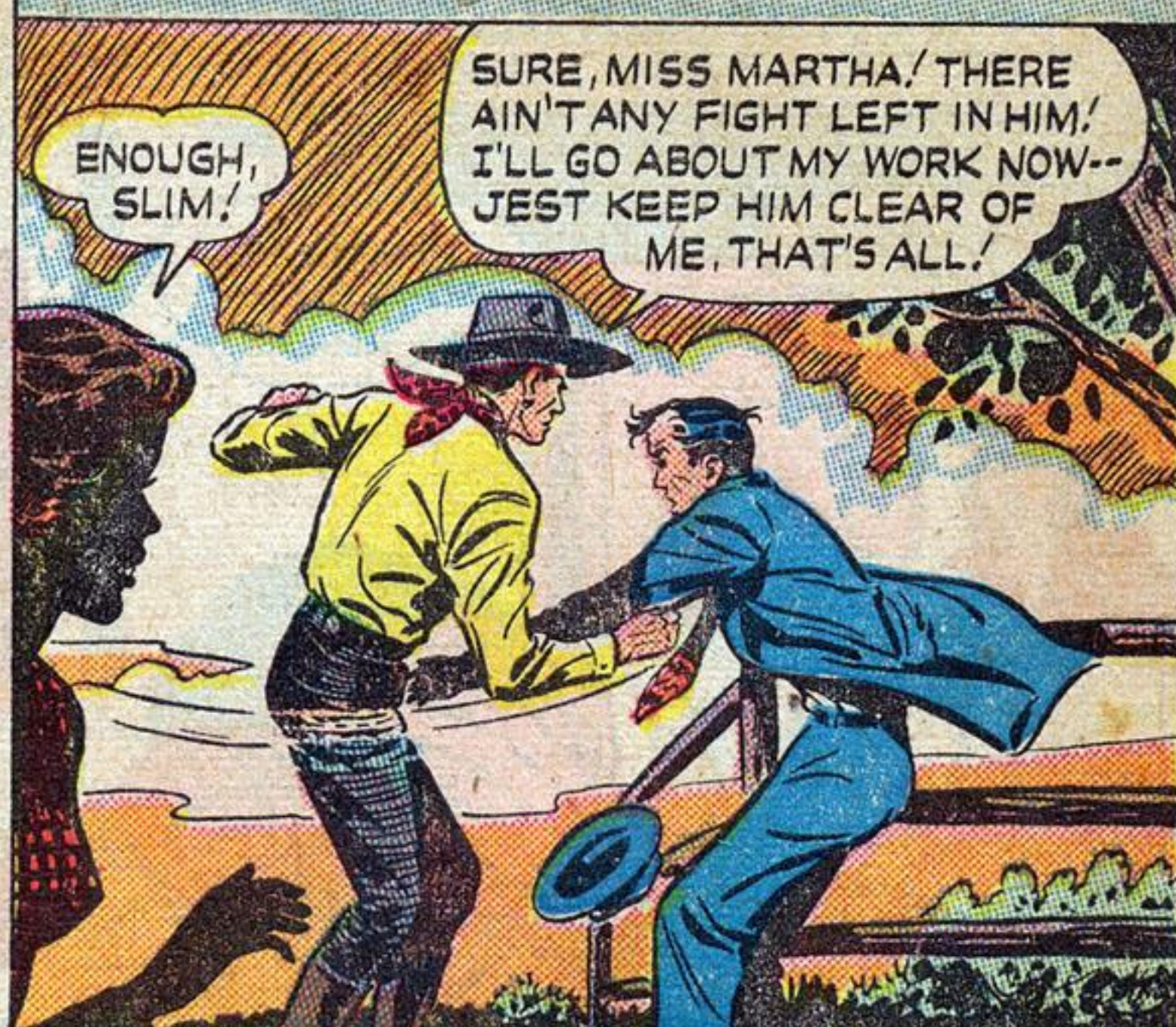
OKAY, COW-BOY-- COME AND GET YOUR LESSON!



THE MEN FOUGHT... SLIM WITH COOL CONFIDENCE... DALE WITH RAGING, UNREASONING FURY, AS IF HE WERE TRYING TO DESTROY THE TORMENT THAT SEETHED INSIDE HIM!



SLIM FINALLY DROVE HOME A POWERFUL BODY PUNCH, WHICH BROUGHT DALE TO HIS KNEES!



ALL RIGHT, GET ON YOUR FEET! YOU'LL BE OKAY IN A FEW MINUTES! HE JUST KNOCKED THE WIND OUT OF YOU!

I'LL BE FINE...ONCE I SHAKE OFF THE DUST OF THIS PLACE! I'M GETTING OUT!



MY PLAN HAD FAILED... THE BITTERNESS THAT RANKLED IN DALE MORGAN WAS STILL THERE! I KNEW HE WAS HUMILIATED BY HIS DEFEAT, BUT I WAS DETERMINED NOT TO EASE UP ON HIM AT ALL!

JUST AS I THOUGHT...YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A QUITTER!

WHAT? WHO ARE YOU TO CALL ME THAT? I'M NO QUITTER!



NO? THEN WHY DON'T YOU BEAT THIS THING THAT'S MAKING YOU INTO A HATEFUL CREATURE! TAKE OFF THAT MASK OF BITTERNESS! BE A MAN!

FINE WORDS! WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE TO YOU?



SUDDENLY I REALIZED THAT WHAT HAPPENED TO DALE MORGAN DID MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO ME! I FOUND MYSELF WONDERING WHAT KIND OF A PERSON HE REALLY WAS, UNDERNEATH THAT HARD SHELL, A SHELL SO EASILY PIERCED...

...MAYBE BECAUSE OF MY DAD... AND YOURS! YOU'LL BREAK YOUR FATHER'S HEART, DALE... IF YOU DON'T STRAIGHTEN UP...GET HOLD OF YOURSELF!

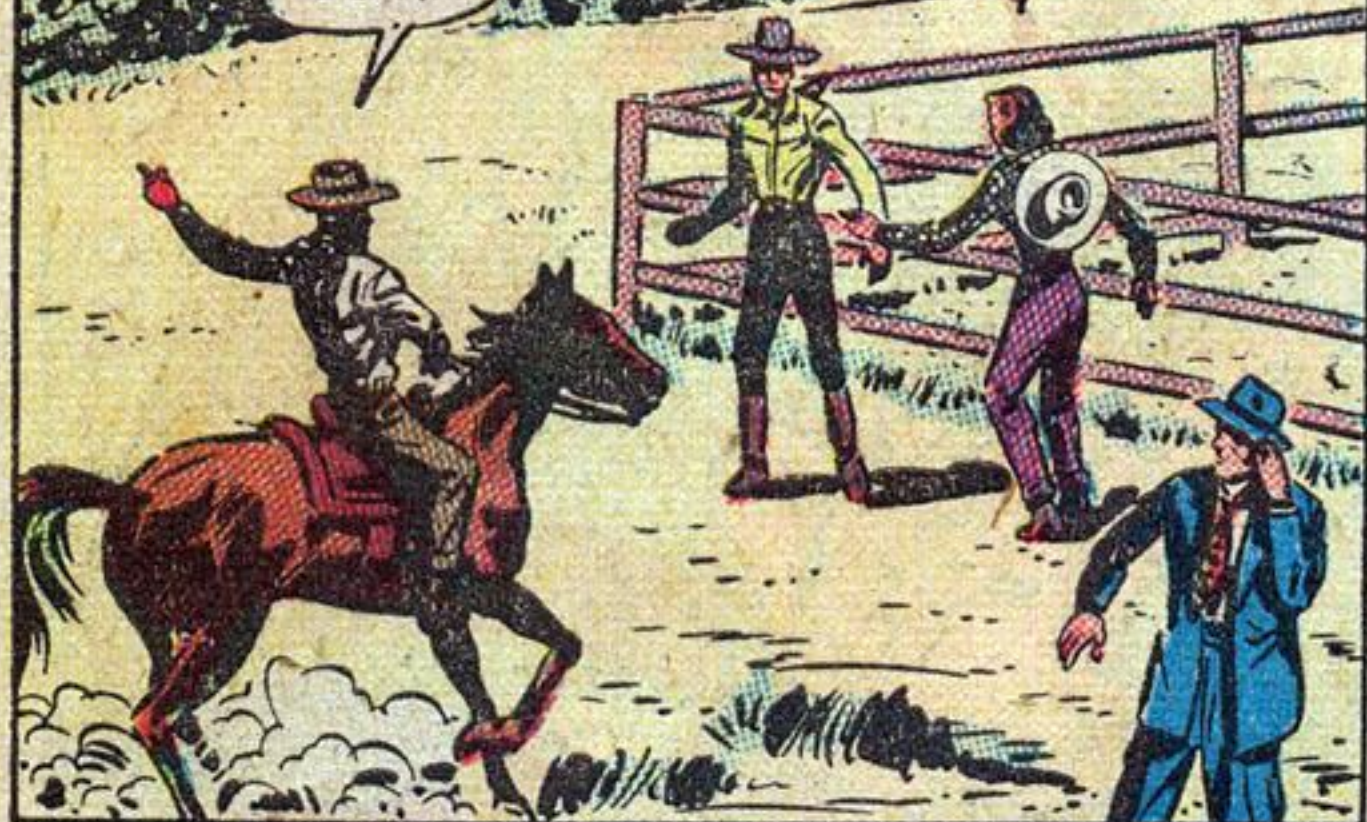
LEAVE MY FATHER OUT OF THIS! I'M TAKING OFF! I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS RANCH! AND... MOST OF ALL... OF YOU!



BUT THEN... SUDDENLY, THERE WAS AN URGENT EMERGENCY! THE ONE THING WE ALL CONSTANTLY FEARED, HAD HAPPENED!

MIZ' MARTHA!
MIZ' MARTHA!
FIRE ON THE
NORTH RANGE!
IT'S SPREADING
LIKE ALL GET-
OUT!

SLIM! ROUND UP THE
BOYS! BRING SHOVELS!
WE'LL HAVE TO STOP
THIS BLAZE BEFORE IT
REACHES THE CATTLE!



THE MEN RACED FOR THEIR HORSES... AND REACHED THE DANGER AREA IN A MATTER OF MINUTES! THEN, ALL WAS CONFUSION AS WE FOUGHT TO WIDEN THE FIRE-BREAK... THE HOLOCAUST WAS APPROACHING LIKE A FIERY SHEET OF DOOM!

CAN'T DIG FAST
ENOUGH, MISS
MARTHA! WE'LL
HAVE TO BLAST!

GET THE
DYNAMITE!

LET ME HELP YOU! I'M
A DEMOLITION EXPERT!
THAT'S WHAT I DID IN
THE WAR!



LIKE A MAN ACCUSTOMED TO BEING OBEYED, DALE TOOK OVER! SKILLFULLY, HE PLACED THE CHARGES! HE WAS DIFFERENT NOW! THERE WAS NO SULKINESS... NO WISE-GUY ATTITUDE! I HELPED HIM SET THE FUSE! THEN...

ALL RIGHT NOW! I'LL
LIGHT THE FUSE!
START RUNNING,
MARTHA!

RIGHT,
DALE!



I HURRIED AWAY TOWARD THE SHELTER OF THE ROCKS, WHERE THE OTHERS CROUCHED! TURNING MY HEAD, I SAW DALE LIGHTING THE FUSE!



THEN... I STEPPED INTO A GOPHER HOLE! I FELL HEAVILY TO THE GROUND, AND FOR A MOMENT WAS STUNNED... THROUGH A HAZE, I HEARD DALE CALL MY NAME...

MARTHA!



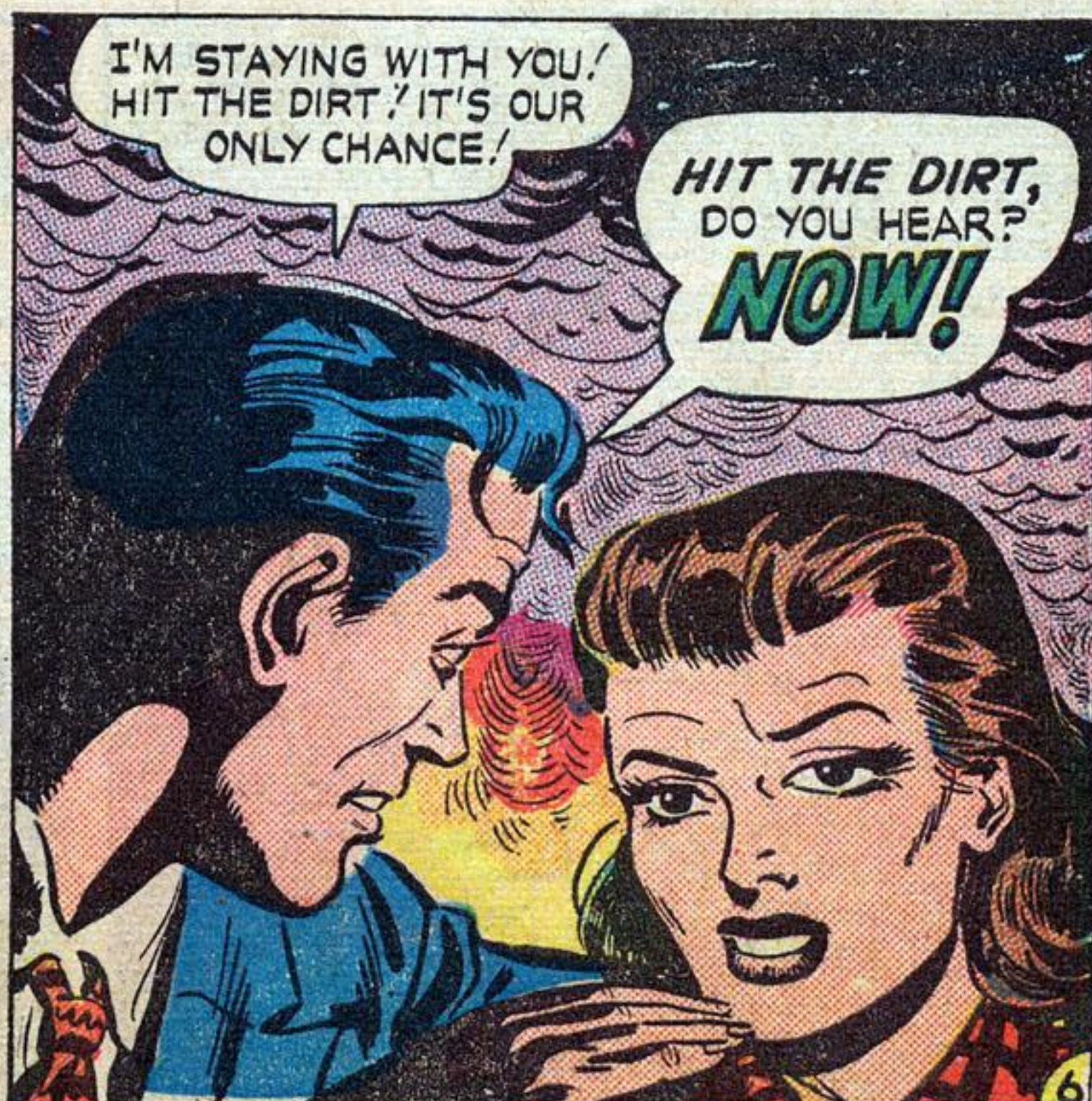
QUICK, MARTHA! THAT'S
A SIXTY-SECOND FUSE!
THERE'S NOT AN INSTANT
TO WASTE!

OH... MY ANKLE! YOU
GO AHEAD, DALE --
YOU'LL NEVER MAKE
IT IF YOU CARRY ME!



I'M STAYING WITH YOU!
HIT THE DIRT! IT'S OUR
ONLY CHANCE!

HIT THE DIRT,
DO YOU HEAR?
NOW!



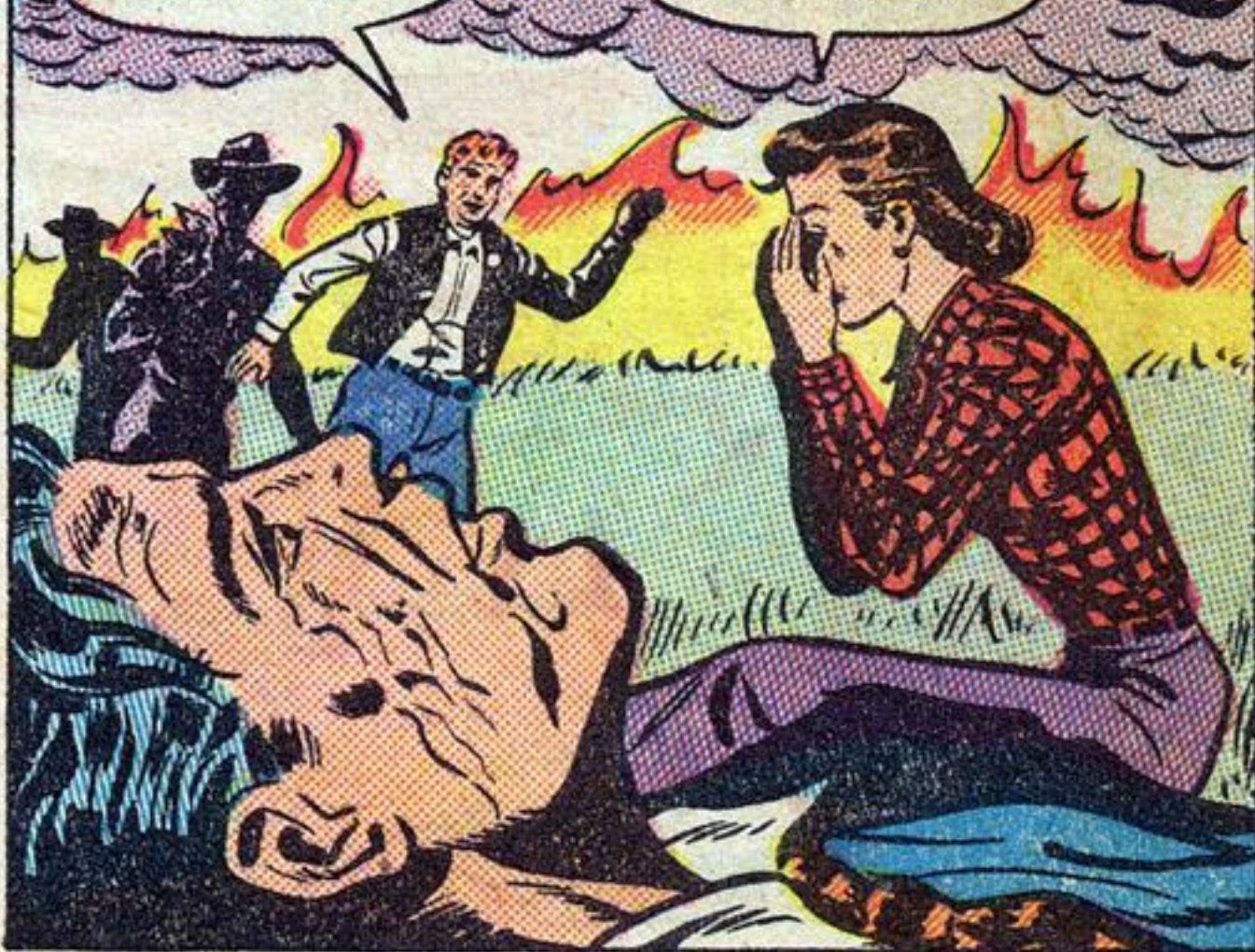
THEN...IT SEEMED AS IF THE WHOLE WORLD HAD GONE MAD! THERE WAS A ROARING EXPLOSION, A BLINDING FLASH...AND THE EARTH TREMBLED BENEATH US! I FELT DALE COVER MY BODY WITH HIS... AS WE WERE PELTED WITH ROCKS AND EARTH...



THEN IT WAS OVER...MY JARRED BRAIN CLEARED... AND I SAW... I SAW DALE, HIS FACE SMEARED WITH BLOOD, LYING BESIDE ME, AS DAD AND THE BOYS CAME ON THE RUN...

MARTHA! MARTHA, BABY! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

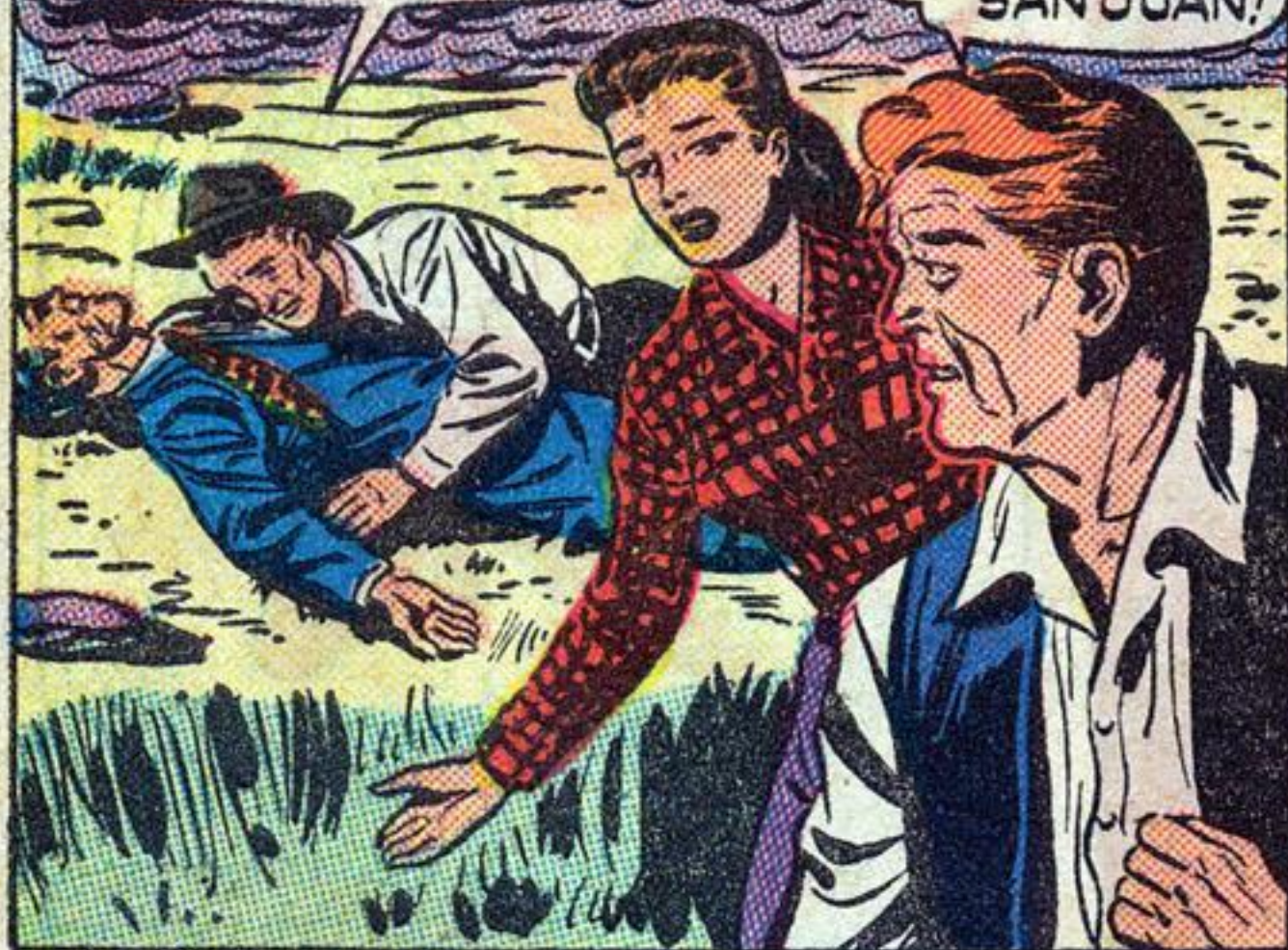
YES, DAD! BUT... DALE... I THINK HE'S... DEAD!



NOPE! HIS HEART'S TICKIN'! I SEEN PLENTY LIKE THIS IN THE WAR, MISS MARTHA! IT'S CONCUSSION... HE'S BANGED-UP PRETTY BAD...BUT HE'S ALIVE!

HURRY, DAD-- HURRY! GET THE DOCTOR! DALE SAVED MY LIFE!

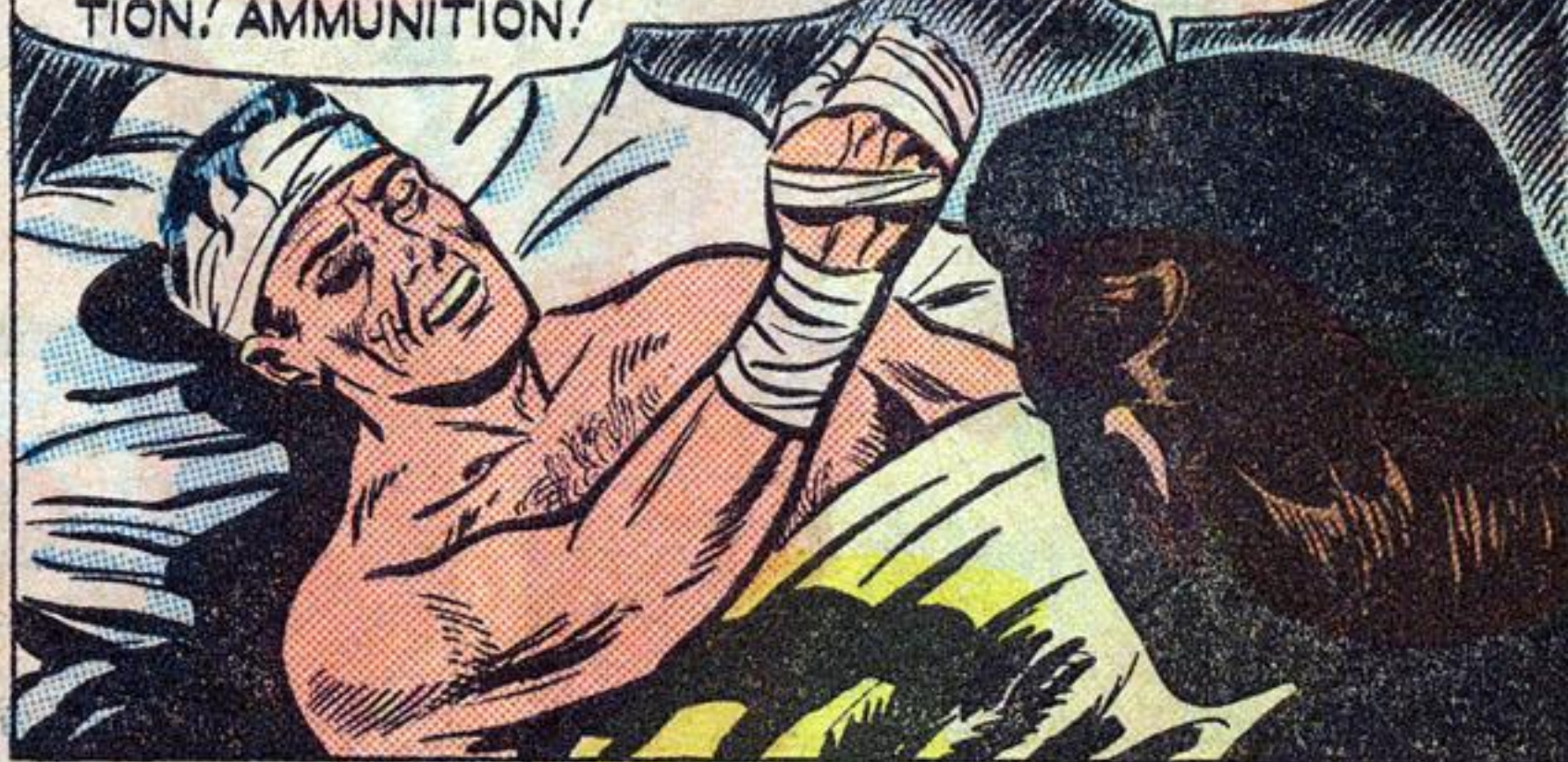
YEP! I WILL! TO PAY BACK WHAT I OWE HIS PA! OLD CHET MORGAN SAVED ME AT SAN JUAN!



WE BROUGHT HIM HOME... AND THE DOCTOR BANDAGED HIM UP! HIS INJURIES WERE NOT SERIOUS, BUT THE TURMOIL INSIDE HIM STILL RAGED! HIS TORTURED MIND, ROCKED BY THE EXPLOSION, BROUGHT BACK HIDEOUS MEMORIES...

DOWN! DOWN! THEY HAVE OUR RANGE! THE GRENADES! NO, SERGEANT! I'LL GO-- I'M YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER! IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT I DIE BEFORE YOU...DOWN! AMMUNITION! AMMUNITION!

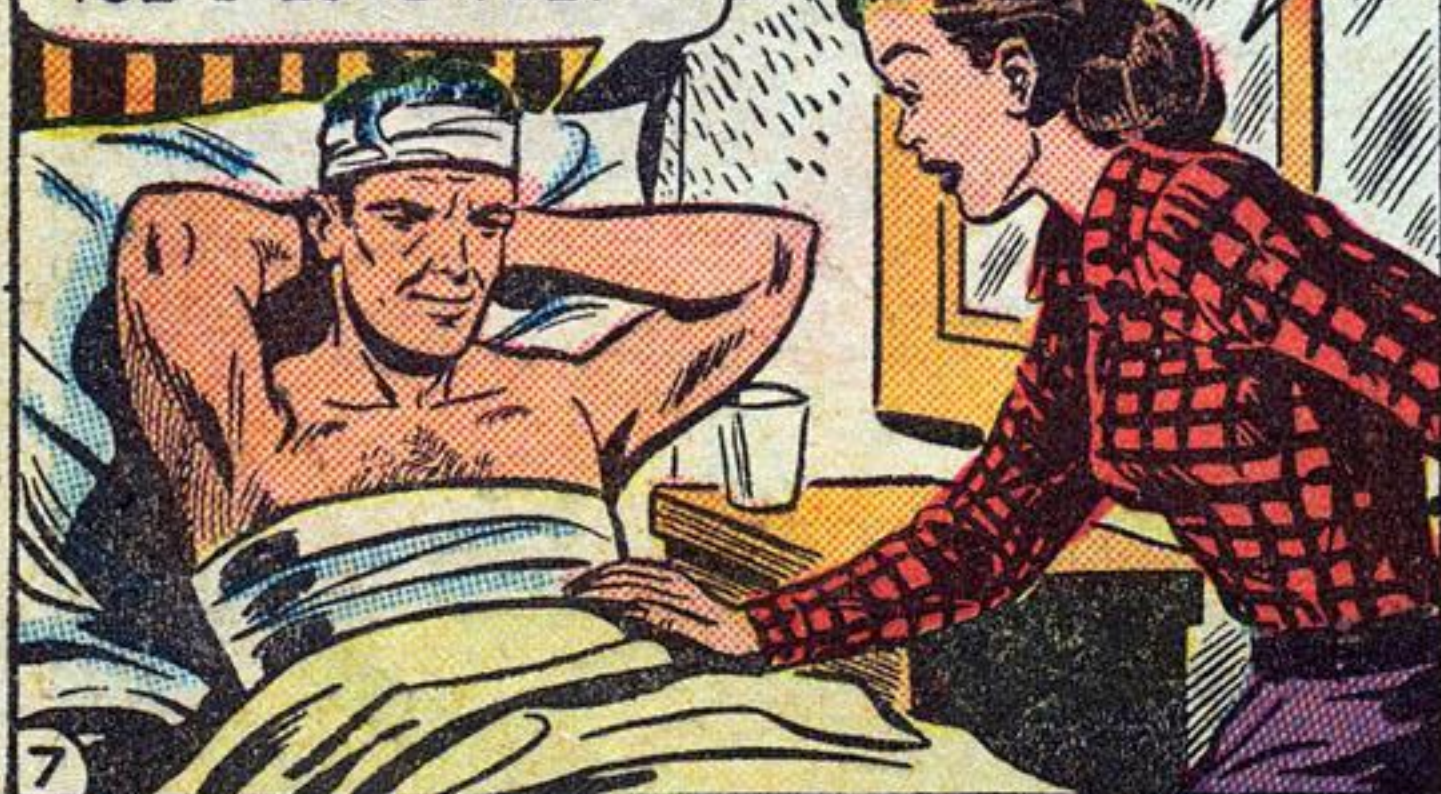
POOR DALE...WITH ALL THE HORROR LOCKED WITHIN YOU, NO WONDER YOU GREW BITTER! BUT, SOON...YOU'LL BE WELL... SOON...



AND I WAS RIGHT! THE EXPLOSION HAD DONE WHAT ALL THE DOCTORS FAILED TO DO... IT BROUGHT DALE BACK TO NORMAL! THE MISTS CLEARED FROM HIS MIND AND HIS NIGHTMARES WERE OVER!

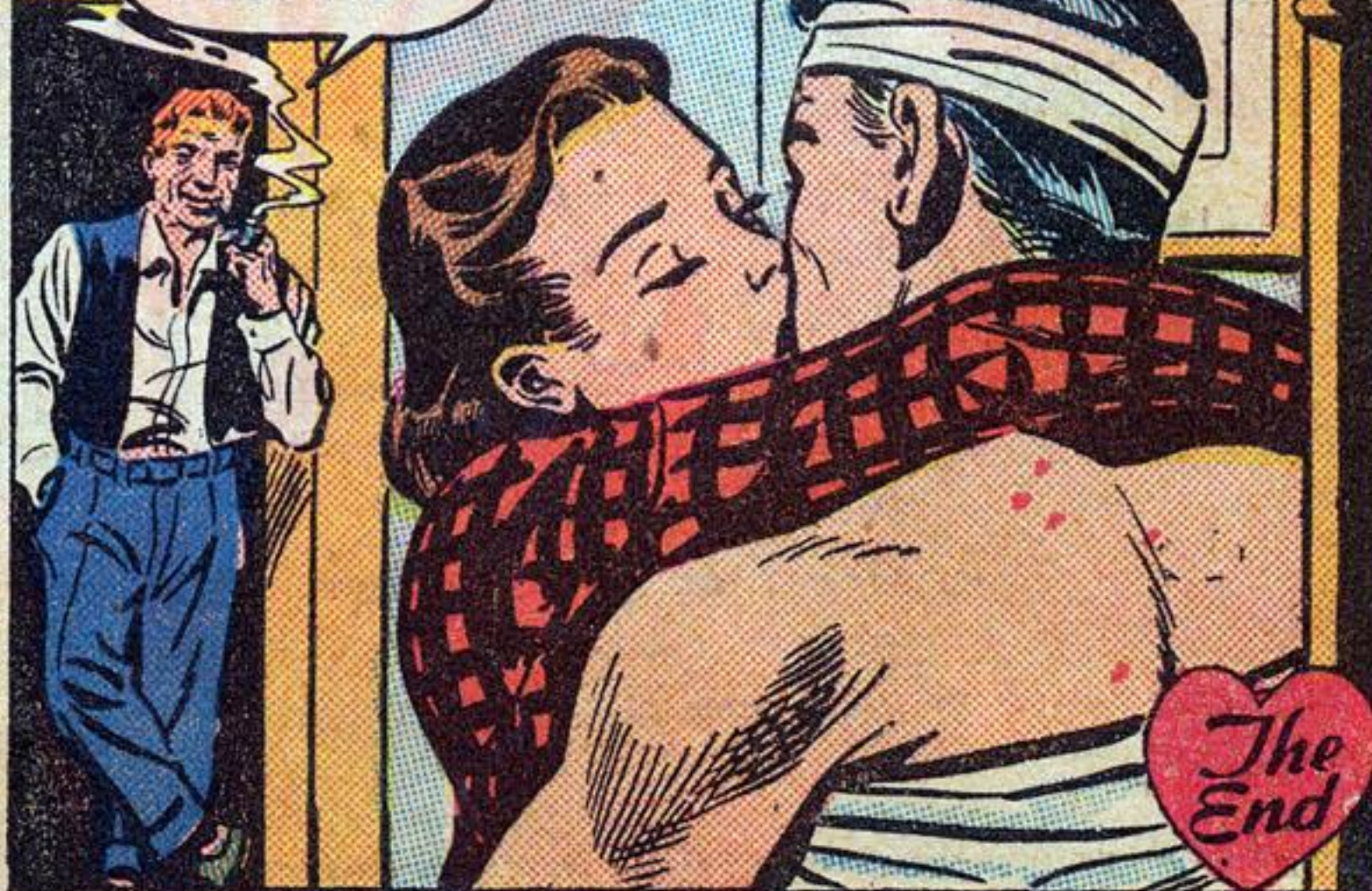
MARTHA... YOU'VE BEEN WONDERFUL! I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY... EXCEPT TO APOLOGIZE FOR THE WAY I ACTED... AND TO TELL YOU I LOVE YOU!

THAT'S THE FIRST SENSIBLE THING YOU'VE SAID SINCE I MET YOU!



AND AS WE KISSED, I KNEW THAT OUR LIPS SPOKE A SILENT PROMISE OF A HAPPY FUTURE...

DOGGONE! RECKON I'D BETTER WIRE CHET MORGAN! DON'T BELIEVE HE'D WANT TO MISS HIS SON'S WEDDING!



The End

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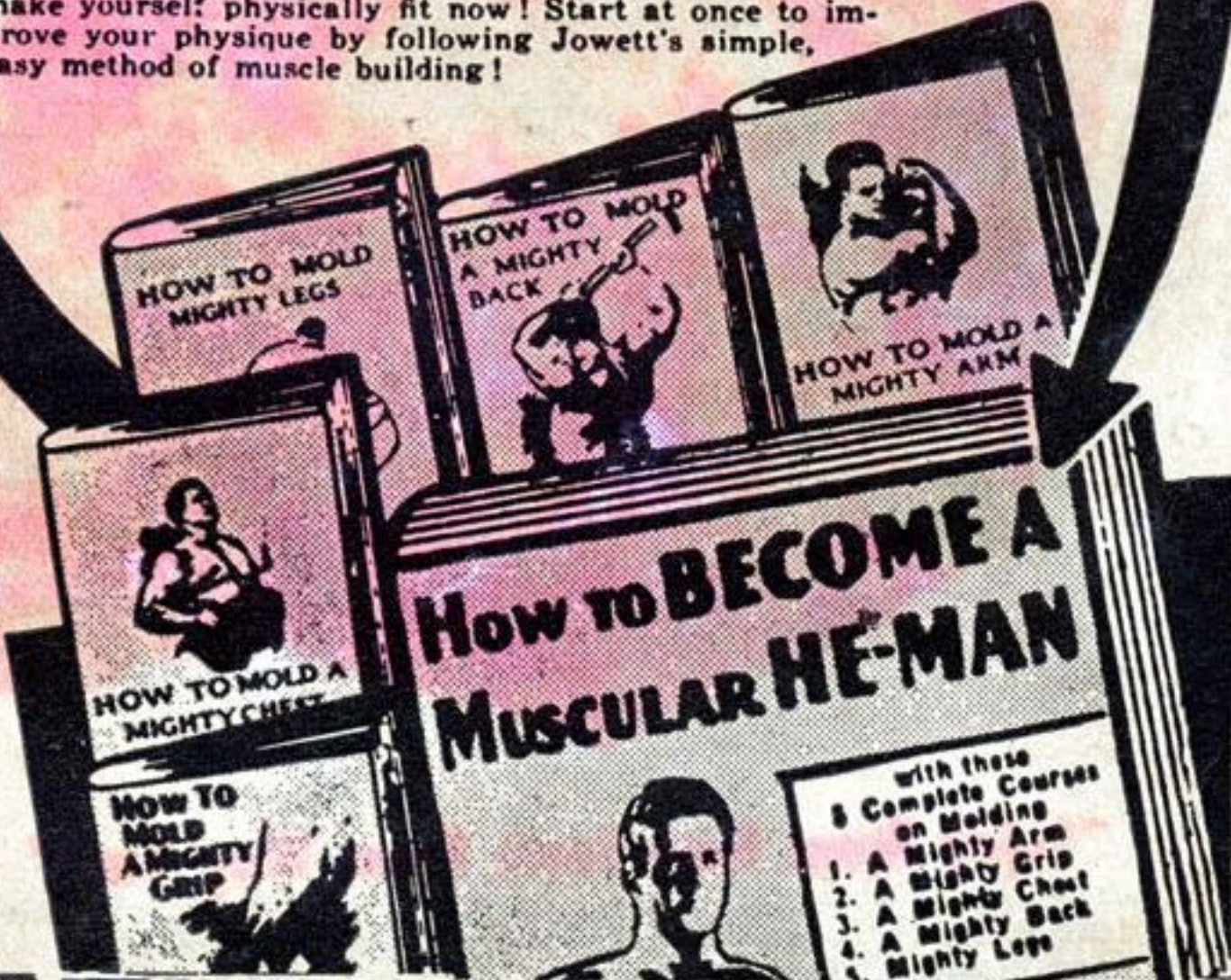
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